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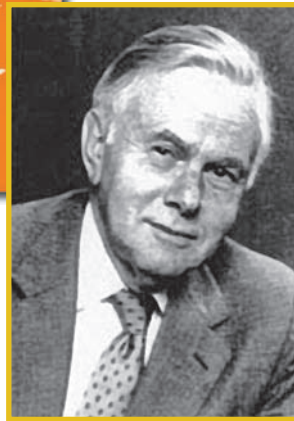
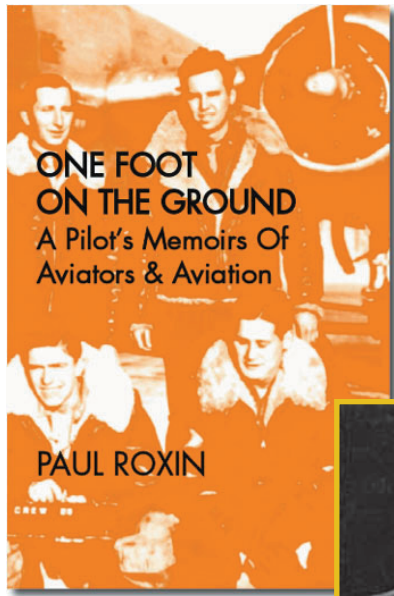
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"The Good Lord Was With Our Crew"

By Sue Higgins | Wayuga Contributing Writer

Local pilot featured in new book about World War II

Paul Roxin is especially suited to writing a book such as "One Foot on the Ground", having had a lifetime of experience with all facets of aviation - from early aircraft and the famous and not-so-famous who flew them, to training fliers during this country's volatile war years of the 1940s. Along the way, Roxin has, in one form or another, gotten to know all about airfields and airports - how they developed and where, and what marvelous advances have been made in aviation from the early 1920s to the present time.



Paul Roxin

Fascinated by flying since the age of 7, Roxin obtained his pilot's license in 1936. He was an instructor and became involved in aircraft communications and airway traffic control for the Bureau of Air Commerce, now known as the Federal Aviation Administration, through the 1950s. During World War II, when there was a desperate need for trained pilots, he taught "ground school" - civil air regulations, meteorology, navigation, and Morse code. For the next 28 years, he was affiliated with General Electric Radio Co., a job in which he applied his knowledge of aircraft communications; today, in his nineties, he is only semi-retired, still having a hand in that field. In the 1990s, Roxin began publishing a series of historical articles on aviation history for the Brighton-Pittsford Post, and Gannett Rochester Newspapers. During this period, he was instrumental in forming the distinctive "Geriatric Pilot's Association," comprised mostly of pilots from World War II. The group convenes periodically.

Paul Spiers could have stayed out of World War II. After graduating from Cornell University in June 1941 with a major in agriculture economics and a minor in farm finance, Spiers returned to work on the family farm, allowing him a 1A classification with the Draft Board.



Paul Spiers now, and, at left, the list of missions he flew in World War II.

DATE	THEATER	NO. OF MILES	NO. OF HOURS	NO. OF MILES	NO. OF HOURS	NO. OF MILES	NO. OF HOURS	NO. OF MILES	NO. OF HOURS
11 Apr 44	Schweinfurt, Germany	89	2145	2145					On-pilot
20 Apr 44	Stavung, France	92	4150	1215					"
22 Apr 44	Ulm, Germany	91	2130	1930					"
24 Apr 44	Geierstorf, Germany	74	1015	2545					"
7 May 44	Stettin, Germany	100	615	3030					"
24 May 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	615	4215					"
29 May 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					"
29 May 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					"
29 May 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					"
29 May 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					"
4 Jun 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					Observer
4 Jun 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					Observer
8 Jun 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					Observer
8 Jun 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					Observer
11 Jun 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					Observer
11 Jun 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					Observer
14 Jun 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					Observer
14 Jun 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					Observer
19 Jun 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					Observer
19 Jun 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					Observer
22 Jun 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					Observer
22 Jun 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					Observer
27 Jun 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					Observer
27 Jun 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					Observer
11 Jul 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					"
11 Jul 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					"
17 Jul 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					"
17 Jul 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					"
23 Jul 44	Stettin, Germany	100	1030	5945					"
23 Jul 44	Geierstorf, Germany	102	2300	4215					"

"My father wanted to keep me out of the war," said Spiers, a Batavia native who eventually settled in Sodus.

But patriotism won out. He and three high school classmates went to Rochester to enlist as aviation cadets in the Reserve Corps. "I had no flying experience," Spiers added.

That changed quickly. First as co-pilot, then as pilot, Paul Spiers flew 32 combat missions in World War II. He is one of the area's few remaining World War II pilots.

Spiers is included in Paul Roxin's recently published "One Foot On The Ground, A Pilot's Memoirs of Aviators & Aviation," a book about pilots who flew during the years of World War II and their flying experiences.

Roxin of Brighton and a civilian instructor of aviation during World War II, also lists in his book the members of the Geriatric Pilots Association. Spiers at 88 years of age is an active member, as is Roxin, who is in his 90s.

Originally organized for World War II pilots, the Geriatric Pilots Association is currently inclusive of pilots who flew during any war, as well as civilian pilots and those with an interest in flying.

"There aren't as many of us left, any more," said Spiers of World War II pilots.

Spiers' training to become a pilot and then his active duty as a combat pilot in World War II took him all over the United States and the world.

On Jan. 13, 1943 Spiers boarded a train for Nashville, Tenn. and a classification center. Four days of medical and mental testing resulted in a pilot bombardier classification for Spiers.

Pre-flight training took him to Montgomery, Ala., where President Franklin Delano Roosevelt drove through in a convertible to view the trainees, as they performed calisthenics.

From there he went for two months of primary flight training in Helena, Ark., where he learned to fly single engine PT23's. Civilian instructors performed primary flight training. Spiers' instructor was a former duster of cotton fields. "He was a crazy guy. One time when I was with him, he tipped his wings in the Mississippi River," Spiers said.

During Basic Flight Training in Newport, Ark., Spiers was trained to fly BT13's, or as they were affectionately called, the vibrators. It was also at this point that he had to decide whether to become a bomber pilot or a fighter pilot. Spiers chose to pursue advanced flight training for bombers in Lawrenceville, Ill., where he flew AT10 Beechcrafts. After two more months his aviation cadet flight training was completed. Spiers became part of the Army Air Force or the 8th Air Force, as it was called in England. He received the rank of 2nd lieutenant, as well as wings that he wore on his uniform.

Spiers wanted to be a B25 pilot, flying medium-sized twin-engine planes. But, on a cold morning in Salt Lake City, Utah, he and a large group of pilots were told that they may as well console themselves, since they would all be flying as co-pilots on four-engine aircrafts, or B17's. Many of the combat missions in World War II were flown in B-17's.

Assigned to a crew of 10 men, Spiers learned to fly B17's and practiced bombing missions in Dalhart, Texas. In Kearney, Neb. his crew was assigned a brand new B17, which cost \$198,000.

In the latter part of February 1944 the crew

flew to Maine, to Labrador, to Iceland and then to Scotland, where alterations were made to the plane. Two weeks of ground training was next, when the English system of radio was taught.

Spiers' crew was sent to the Grafton Underwood Base in northern England, 75 miles north of London, where they were assigned to the 384th Bomb Group and the 545th Bomb Squadron.

On April 13, 1944 Spiers flew his first mission. The 384th Bomb Group took off in a 19-plane formation for Schweinfurt, Germany, their target a ball bearing plant. As the 384th entered German air space, German planes dove on them and in three minutes had shot down eight of the 19 planes, the lead plane plus seven of the planes on the left side of the formation, leaving only Spiers' crew and plane unscathed on that side.

This German drive broke the formation of the 384th, causing them to regroup, jockey for position, then complete the mission. On the way back across Belgium, in an area where no flak had previously been received, the remaining 11 planes took anti-aircraft fire. "The second shot pushed us up 500 feet into the air. We thought it was a 105 mm. It had tremendous lethal charge. It hit the wing of the plane we were flying off of. The plane hit us," explained Spiers. "We never saw anyone bail out of the plane."

However, years later at a 384th Bomb Group Association meeting, Spiers spoke with the waist gunner from that plane, who had been blown free of it by the explosion. He was unconscious, but wearing his chest pack. The parachute expanded. On the way down he came to. When he landed, even with broken bones, he did as instructed and buried everything. The Germans captured him. But, a Belgian nurse came to help him with his injuries and placed him in a Belgian hospital.

He told Spiers that four of the men survived the explosion. Two went through the underground in France to return to base.

Spiers' first mission was the worst mission the 384th flew, with nine out of 19 planes shot down. Back on base he was told that he would probably never see anything like that again.

However, on April 24, 1944 the 384th Bomb Group set out for Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany, their target an airplane factory. The Germans had begun to manufacture a new plane, one with both a propeller and an engine in the front, as well as the back of the plane.

Spiers' B17 was hit with a 30mm shell that went into the leading edge of the wing on the left side, cutting a bunch of lines, causing a fire. The pilot gave the bail out orders. Spiers went for the fire extinguisher, then turned off one of the gas lines. The fire went out. The crew remained on board.

The plane lost a lot of hydraulic fluid. As they began to land with barely enough fluid to allow the brakes to work, they gave a signal that they had problems. An ambulance arrived. As Spiers stepped from the plane, the ambulance crew asked how many were dead. The red hydraulic fluid smeared along the side of the plane looked like blood.

Statistics published by the Army Air Forces tell a dramatic story about the air war against Germany. During the course of the war, 1,693,565 sorties were flown by 32,263 combat aircraft.

Incredibly Fifty-five percent of these 32,263 aircraft were lost in action while 29,916 enemy aircraft were destroyed. On the human side, there were 94,565 American air combat casualties with 30,099 killed in action. There were 51,106 American airmen were either missing in action, POWs, evaders, or internees.

The B-17 was one of the major offensive weapons of World War II with the G model playing the major role in Allied bombardment.

Spiers said, "None."

Seven planes were shot down on that mission, Spiers' fourth.

In total, during April 1944, the group lost 20 planes, 16 were lost during Spiers' first and fourth missions.

Spiers completed 15 missions as co-pilot, 14 as pilot and three as observer, where he flew in the first plane in the tail gunner position to make notes, mostly mental.

"The good Lord was with our crew," said Spiers. "The only injury we had happened during evasive action, when a 50 caliber gun hit the gunner on the side of his face, causing him to lose a few teeth. We never lost an engine," continued Spiers.

On July 21, 1944 Spiers flew his last combat mission in World War II. He was flown back to the states, where he was given a week of R&R in Atlantic City. "But, a hurricane hit, so I was sent home, where I had more time with my family," said Spiers.

Spiers was assigned as an instructor pilot to the B17 Bomber Base in Avon Park, Fla.. Promoted to flight commander, he was in charge of training 14 flight crews. He was also a member of the Pilot Standardization Board, which was in charge of standardizing instruction for base pilots.

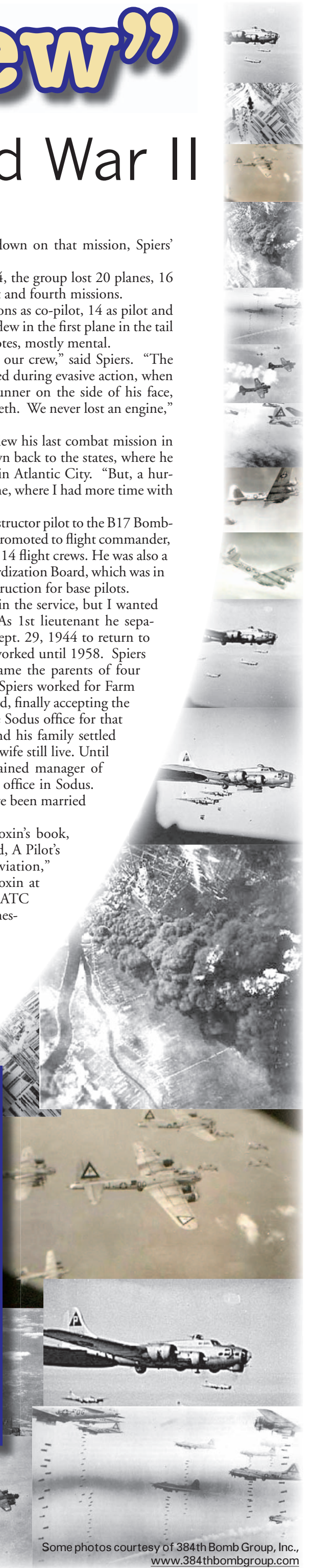
"They wanted me to stay in the service, but I wanted home," exclaimed Spiers. As 1st lieutenant he separated from the service on Sept. 29, 1944 to return to his family farm, where he worked until 1958. Spiers and his wife, Barbara, became the parents of four daughters. For eight years Spiers worked for Farm Family Insurance in Pittsford, finally accepting the position of manager for the Sodus office for that insurance company. He and his family settled in Sodus, where he and his wife still live. Until his retirement, Spiers remained manager of the Farm Family Insurance office in Sodus. Paul and Barbara Spiers have been married 61 years.

For information about Roxin's book, "One Foot On The Ground, A Pilot's Memoirs of Aviators & Aviation," or to order one, contact Roxin at 585-473-1189. Or, write ATC Press, 84 Irving Road, Rochester 14618.

For information on the Geriatric Pilots Association, contact Spiers at 483-9225.



Paul Spiers' 384th Bomb Group



Some photos courtesy of 384th Bomb Group, Inc., www.384thbombgroup.com