**“The Good Lord was with our crew”**

Local pilot featured in new book about World War II

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.

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

But paralleling that, he and three high school classmates went to Rochester to order aviation cadets in the Reserve Corps. “I had no flying experience," Spiers added.

Then things changed. First as co-pilot, then as pilot, Paul Spiers flew 32 combat missions in World War II. He is one of a select 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 number of the Geriatric Pilots Association. Spiers at 88 years of age in an active member, as is Roxin, as it 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 civilians and those with an interest in flying. “They include as many as 100 members, as many,” said Spiers of World War II pilots.

Spielers’ mission became a pilot and then his active duty as a combat pilot in World War II took him all over the United States and overseas.

On Jan. 15, 1943 Spiers boarded a train for Nashville, Tenn. 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 Roosevelt’s Doolittle Roughneck dorso through in a converted to view the training, as they performed calisthenics.

From there followed six months of primary flight training in Helena, Ark., where he learned to fly single engine PT22’s. Civilian instructors performed primary flight training. Spiers instructor was a former duster of cotton fields. “He was a crazy bloke," Spiers said.

After six months of primary and seven of advanced training, Spiers reported to the 384th Bomb Group at St. Eval, England in January 1944.

There Spiers was assigned as an instructor pilot to the B17 Bomber Command. He was in charge of training 14 flight crews.

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 waving his shoot punk. The parachute expanded. On the way down he came to. When he landed, Spiers was told that when he landed, he did in inadvertent and hurt himself, which was 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. During the flight through the underground in France, Spiers said, “The bad guys foreboding of the gas lines. The fire went out. The crew remained on board.

However, on April 24, 1944 the 384th Bomb Group set out for Ochelofeld, 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.

Spielers’ B17 was hit by a 30 mm shell that went into the leading edge of the wing on the left side, caving a bunch of lines, causing a fire. The pilot gave the crew an order. Spiers were for the first 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 flew, they attempted to find another crew.

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

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 94,665 American air combat casualties with 30,099 killed in action. There were 51,106 American airmen were either missing in action, POWs, evaders, or internes.

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.