

Partial Life and Times of

Jack Spencer

Mainly, time in the Air Force during WWII, through 1955



Air Force Training Prior to Combat

Combat Flying, 301st Bomb Group, 419th Squadron

Service in the Air Force Reserve

Information from records and memory gathered together during several months in 2011 and 2012.

14 Steps in My Service for Our Country, the United States of America

Jack Spencer

1. Voluntarily Enlisted in Army Air Corps Reserve While at Wayne University (10-08-42 to 02-24-43)
2. Ordered to Active Duty as a Private, Army Air Corps- Miami Beach, FL (02-25-43 to 03-14-43)
3. College Training Detachment- Williamsport, PA (03-15-43 to 07-16-43)
4. Classification- Nashville, TN (07-17-43 to 07-31-43)
5. Pre-Flight Training- Maxwell Field, Montgomery, AL (08-01-43 to 10-30-43)
6. Primary Flight Training- Lodwick Aviation Military Academy, Avon Park, FL (10-31-43 to 01-14-44)
7. Basic Flight Training- Cochran Field, Macon, GA (01-15-44 to 03-22-44)
8. Advanced Flight Training, Twin Engine- Freeman Field, Seymour, IN (03-23-44 to 06-01-44)
 - (a) Received "Wings" (05-23-44)
 - (b) Received Rank of 2nd Lt. (05-23-44)
9. Co-Pilot Training in B-17- Tyndall Field, Panama City, FL (06-02-44 to 08-31-44)
10. Replacement Training Unit- Drew Field, Tampa, FL (09-01 44 to 11-26-44)
 - (a) Meet Organized Crew
 - (b) Train Together as a Crew
11. Preparation for Trip to Europe- Hunter Field, Savannah GA (11-27-44 to 12-13-44)
 - (a) Received Necessary Equipment for Crew
 - (b) Received New B-17G and We Calibrated the Instruments
12. Embarkation to European Destination- (12-14-44 to 12-31-44)
13. Combat Flying Tour in 301 Bomb Group, 419 Squadron, Italy- (01-01-45 to 08-07-45)
14. Reserve Duty Service- (08-08-45 to 06-07-55)

(My Army Air Corps training period, prior to combat, was approx. 22 months long)

14 Steps of Air Force Service

1. I Enlisted in Army Air Corps Reserve While Attending Wayne U. (10-08-42 to 02-24-43)

I voluntarily enlisted in the Army Air Corps, now called Air Force, on October 8, 1942. Geraldine Lucille Bates (Gerry) and I were married on Friday, October 9, 1942. I was back in school on Monday morning, the 12th. While attending Wayne University, prior to entering the service, Gerry and I lived at 1326 Stanley Ave., Detroit. My intent, and the promise of the recruiter, was for me to be in the Air Corps Reserve while continuing my education and getting my degree; then I would serve my time in service. That was not the way it happened!

2. Ordered to Active Duty as Private, Army Air Corps- Miami Beach, FL (02-25-43 to 03-14-43))

On February 20, 1943, I received a letter which read "By direction of the President, you are ordered to active duty effective February 25, 1943, and on that date will proceed from your home or place of receipt of this order to Chicago, Illinois, reporting not later than 8:30 A.M., to the Officer in Charge at the rendezvous point, 515 S. Franklin St., Chicago, Illinois, for temporary duty and upon completion thereof, will proceed to Miami, Florida, reporting to the Commanding Officer, Army Air Force Technical Training Command, Miami Basic Training Center #4, February 27, 1943, for pre-Aviation Cadet basic training."

At Chicago we were given physical exams, then, as a large group, we boarded a train of many "day coaches," mess cars, toilet cars, and spent three days on our way to Miami Beach, Florida. Upon arrival, there was a delay of a few days in issuing clothing and assigning facilities while we stayed at the "Whitelaw Hotel." We began to have P.T. (physical training) and close order, and open order drill, and lectures in small groups out-of-doors in the Florida sunshine. Emphasis was on what the Air Corps was all about.

In spite of the considerable paperwork in my "201 files," there is very little documentation of my activity in the form of official documents showing my transferring from one location to another until after I became an officer. Therefore, I have to guess at much of the chronology.

3. College Training Detachment- Williamsport, PA (03-15-43 to 07-16-43)

On March 15, 1943, a large group of us were moved by troop train to Dickenson Junior College at Williamsport, PA, for CTD (College Training Detachment) training. This was a quaint, small city of approximately 50,000 population, with what appeared as an old, small junior college. Our barracks was a four story structure, two men to a room, over-looking a parade field, which, in peace time, was the athletic field. My wife, Gerry, came after a couple weeks, rented a room in town, and worked in the school cafeteria part time. On occasion, we cadets had "open post," when we could go off post; and, of course, married cadets could spend time with their wives.

Looking back, I think that the purpose of the CTD was to give time to allow the "pipeline" of cadets waiting for the training facilities throughout the country to accommodate them. We attended classes of geography, basic math, history, typical classes of a junior college. Of course we had a lot of physical training, even running in groups through the streets of the city. We also had parades through the city

streets. There was close order drill, and parade formations on the field. A chapel, next to the field had a cafeteria (mess hall) in the basement. We occasionally had lectures in the chapel. We kept very busy for the time that we were there.

The highlight of our training at CTD was 10 hours of flying time in a Piper Cub with an instructor at the Lycoming Airport. I think that a few of our group found out that they were very susceptible to air-sickness, and became a member of the "mop and bucket" club.

4. Classification- Nashville, TN (07-17-43 to 07-31-43)

On July 17, 1943, some, or all, of our detachment were sent to Nashville, TN, to a Classification Center. There was a lot of idle time spent there. The weather became very hot and there was laxity of regulation; much loafing time was spent under barracks that were on posts, off the ground, watching and teasing "ant lions" in the sandy soil. We were tested extensively on questionnaire forms which, after evaluations, were used for interviews with officers that were psychologists, trying to determine how to classify us- primarily as to pilot, navigator, bombardier, or maybe none of them.

My clearest recollection of my time there was after we had all those tests and I was in an interview with an officer who asked me what one of the three flying officer positions that I desired. My response was that I will accept whatever those extensive tests determine that I am most capable to be. He was not happy with that answer, and emphatically stated that I had to tell him what I wanted to be. I asked if the tests indicated that I could be a pilot. He responded in the affirmative. I responded that I would like to be a pilot; that was the end of the interview.

5. Pre-Flight Training- Maxwell Field, Montgomery, AL (08-01-43 to 10-30-43)

On August 1, 1943, our group traveled by troop train to Montgomery, AL, to Maxwell Field. This was for Basic Pre-Flight Training, very strict training. We really had to "toe the mark" there. The "Cadet" status was emphasized to the extreme. Cadet Officers used tactics much like hazing procedures in a college fraternity. Our housing appeared to be built specifically for such training. We were given "gigs" for minor infractions such as moisture in a hand bowl upon inspections that were called regularly. A few times we were awakened in the middle of the night and had to be in dress uniform and in formation at attention in the dark. Purpose of this was to hear the announcement by the Cadet Captain that one of us had been found guilty of an egregious violation of one of our rules of conduct, of which I can't remember. For small infractions we were given gigs, which when accumulated to ten, the penalty was to walk a "tour." This penalty occurred when an open post was announced and consisted of being in full dress uniform and walking at attention back and forth between two designated spots for an hour. This penalty had to be performed before you could go on open post. Gerry had a room in a private home in Montgomery, a quiet neighborhood. During war time there was an attitude that we all were in the war effort together, a feeling of cooperation and accommodation.

I experienced a racial issue on a public bus in Montgomery. As a northern boy from Detroit, I was accustomed to black students at school and Wayne University, on street cars and busses; so I was unaware of open discrimination. I boarded a bus and sat in the back because there was more seating space. A black lady got on the bus and just stood in the aisle near me. I didn't know why until the white driver stopped the bus, came to where I was sitting and ordered me to move to a seat closer to the front. It didn't matter to him or anyone else that I was in uniform; that was the law, evidently. Official graduation from Pre-flight training at Maxwell Field occurred a few days later on November 03, 1943.

6. Primary Flight Training- Lodwick Aviation Military Academy, Avon Park, FL (10-31-43 to 01-14-44)

On October 31, 1943, paperwork officially transferred me from Maxwell Field to 61st FTD AAFPCPS (P), which was Primary Flight Training at Avon Park, FL., also called Lodwick Aviation Academy, according to a big sign on the front of the building facing the highway. Approx. November 06, 1943, we traveled by train to Avon Park, FL. There were a number of cadet wives that traveled together in a car. Their highway travels were harrowing because of night driving in fog. The weather in Avon Park was very warm and humid. In addition to a hotel building, there was a relatively new barracks building located nearby. The overall setting was like a country club; there was a small, private lake with what appeared like unlimited acres of orange and grapefruit trees. There was another smaller building about a quarter mile away where we had classes of training in aircraft engines and safety in flying, the use of parachutes, and identification of aircraft, friendly and enemy at fractions of a second.

Several of our wives obtained employment in a canteen in the lower level of the hotel, where we often flocked when we had time off. There were tennis courts on the grounds, but I didn't see them used by cadets. Much of our physical training was running in groups around the lake, through fruit trees, occasionally stopping to pick fruit and rest. We were able to go swimming, even in December. This was so different than Maxwell Field and Basic Pre-Flight. I actually enjoyed this phase of training.

We had a rigorous schedule of flying which was at the airfield, closer in to the town of Avon Park. The plane that we were being trained in here was the Stearman PT-13, bi-plane with a Continental radial engine, with two open seats. The student was in the front seat and the instructor in the rear. We had civilian instructors. Mine was Matt Pilcher, probably 35 to 40 years old, who lived with his family in town, a very caring person and wanted to help his students in an understanding way. His attitude was probably why I remember him among all the other instructors throughout my training.

From our barracks, we would start out early in the morning, being bussed to the airport in groups. Very many mornings there would be ground fog, so that we would have to wait, often for about an hour for it to lift. There was a rule that a parachute had to be worn if you got into the cockpit of the plane, no matter if you were just going to taxi it to another location on the field. When you taxied, you had to swing the plane from right to left so that you could see each side ahead because the front of the plane was higher than the rear. The rear wheel was very small compared to the forward wheels, none of which were retractable. We were taught to make three point landings in all the planes that I flew. Three point landings are more difficult to make because you have to coordinate stalling speed with the touch-down of all wheels.

I recall an incident at the wind tee on a grass field remote from the airport. It was a pleasant day and many students were making their solo flights. I had successfully completed my solo flight and was standing with Instructor Pilcher at the wind tee, with two or three other cadets, watching planes landing and taking off. Suddenly there were expressions of concern as one plane taking off had the wheels of a plane landing touch its top wing; both cadets were alert and the landing plane suddenly increased throttle speed and got out of the way. The lower plane continued taking off. Matt Pilcher commented "Angels are looking after Cadets."

7. Basic Flight Training- Cochran Field, Macon GA (01-15-44 to 03-22-44)

On January 15, 1944, the survivors of primary flight training were moved on to Cochran Field, Macon, GA., Basic Flight Training. Housing there was in two story wooden buildings, two cadets to a room, the usual open showers and toilet facilities. There was the usual mess hall, parade and physical training field. We had a "day room" which was a separate building where we could relax when we had spare time (scarce) and meet with our wives or friends to visit. We had instructors for training, but much solo time to use what we learned. We learned to use maps while flying cross-country, which way to make emergency landings by looking for smoke trails from chimneys and the names of towns that were shown on water towers. My roommate, Edsel Stricklin, from New Hampshire, was over due on one of his cross-country trips; we went to dinner that evening without him, but he arrived back while we were eating. We all were very much relieved. He had gotten a little lost because of wrong reading of his map.

We learned and practiced take-offs, landings, cross-wind landings, short field landings, instrument flying, solo acrobatics, night flying, formation flying and cross country flying.

8. Advanced Flight Training, Twin Engine- Freeman Field, Seymour, IN (03-23-44 to 06-01-44)

On March 23, 1944, we moved to Freeman Field, Seymour IN, for Advanced Two Engine Flying Training, to be qualified in AT-10 trainer aircraft. At this station, we had to apply all that we had learned previously about flying to a larger aircraft. More emphasis on night flying, formation, cross country navigation and instrument flying. We were housed in separate, relatively smaller buildings, one story, containing approximately 16 cadets each, heated with a coal-burning stove.

On May 23, 1944, I received a commission as 2nd Lt., also received my pilot's wings, at Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana. My wife had a room in town where I headed whenever we had open post. This day was the highlight of my service time to date. Not only was my wife there to celebrate, but my mother and father, who expressed pride in my accomplishment.

We received a Leave of Absence for (10) days from 05-23-44, to 06-02-44, leaving Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana in preparation to go to Panama City, Florida. We spent most of that time at my parent's home in Detroit

9. Co-Pilot Training in B-17- Tyndall Field, Panama City, FL (06-02-44 to 08-31-44)

This was a transformation from a two engine aircraft to a four engine Flying Fortress. One of our main learning experiences was a teaching experience for gunnery students who would later be part of a B-17 crew as gunners. We flew at low levels, approximately 20 feet, over the Gulf of Mexico so that the gunnery students on board could fire 50 caliber machine guns at targets on anchored floats in the Gulf. Altogether, there were (13) .50 caliber machine guns on the B-17G, and when they were firing at targets, the noise was deafening, along with the (4) 1,200 hp Wright Cyclone Engines at speeds of 160 mph. We learned and practiced take-offs, landings, cross-wind landings, short field landings, night flying, instrument flying day and night, formation flying, and cross country flying.

One strong recollection I have in this phase of training was the intense heat experienced in the cockpit of the B-17 sitting on the asphalt paved ramp, with the Florida July sun beating down on everything,

including the Plexiglas nose of the cockpit. I don't recall the exact temperature, but it must have been similar to the Mohave Desert at 120 degrees.

My wife, Gerry, rented a room in town and I spent time with her when we had open post. The barracks provided to us were similar to that at Freeman Field. I had two hospital stays at Tyndall Field; one because of a severe case of Athlete's foot, which was about a ten day stay; another of about two days due to ptomaine poisoning that I received at the base mess. After eating, I had gone to visit Gerry in town, which was about nine miles from the base. I became so ill, that Gerry called the base and they sent an ambulance and took me to the base hospital where they relieved me with a shot of morphine.

We received a Leave of Absence for (7) days from 08-17-44, to 08-23-44, leaving Tyndall Field, Panama City, Florida, to go to Drew Field, Tampa, Florida, (3rd AF Replacement Depot, Plant Park).

10. Replacement Training Unit- Drew Field, Tampa, FL (09-01-44 to 11-26-44)

Upon arriving at Drew Field, Tampa, we went through severe physical exams, which were performed at the sports stadium, downtown Tampa. Under the stands there was adequate space for various kinds of physical examinations, many kinds of shots given, wisdom teeth removed that were impacted, gold fillings taken from teeth and replaced with amalgam; (who received the gold?) it was a production line activity that could compare to the auto industry in Detroit. I remember that for dental work, you would get in one line for a shot of anesthetic, then stand in another line to have a tooth removed, or a filling installed; then another line to handle any after affects. We were not pampered, but we survived.

We were assembled into crews according to orders prepared by authorities, without discrimination or preference. Our crew were all affable and we got along fine. We started a rigorous training schedule together, which included all phases of our past training for each of our specialties, all of us doing our job as a crew would do in combat.

From my records this was our crew, #10-53

John W. Stanger, First Pilot, 2nd Lt., Ser. No. 0827987

Jack Spencer, Co-Pilot, 2nd Lt. Ser. No. 0830731

Charles D. Ruzsa, Navigator, 2nd Lt., Ser. No. 02069130

Richard E. Griffin, Flight Engineer Gunner, Cpl., Ser. No.19116250

Herbert D. White, Radio Operator, Cpl., Ser. No. 31301530

George P. Neal, Aerial Gunner, Cpl., Ser. No. 14128360

Victor E. Selby, Ball Gunner, Cpl., Ser. No. 37680245

Eugene V. Sherrer, Waist Gunner, Cpl., Ser. No. 38548538

George R. Peterson, Waist Gunner, Cpl., Ser. No. 17145102

A Bombardier was not assigned to our crew. My assumption is that at the time of our crew being put together, the type of bombing being done in Europe was called "saturation," rather than "pin-point." This was a condition where one bombardier would be in a lead ship of the squadron of (7) planes, the navigator in all the other planes in the squadron would watch the lead plane over the target, when the bomb bay doors were opened, he would hit the switch to open their bomb bay doors, then watch, and as soon as bombs were seen dropped from the lead plane, he would hit all the toggle switches, bombs left the planes and they would give a perceptible slight rise from the loss of weight. Therefore, a bombardier was not required for every crew.

Gerry had obtained a small apartment in a large home in Tampa. It was large enough so that my mother also visited a few days before our crew left for Savannah. Shortly after we moved to Tampa, and after our short leave,

11. Preparation for Trip to Europe- Hunter Field, Savannah, GA (11-27-44 to 12-13-44)

November 27, 1944, as a crew we were transferred to Hunter Field, Savannah, Georgia, where we remained until December 13, 1944 when we flew out as a crew in a new B-17G on our way to Italy.

12. Embarkation to European Destination- (12-14-44 to 12-31-44)

The following account of activities is taken from pencil notes that I made at that time of our trip to Italy:

Wed., Dec. 13 We got our plane 46862 and calibrated instruments for 4 hrs. Hunter Field.

Thurs. morn., Dec., 14 we left for Bangor, Maine, and arrived there at 16:30, very cold, 8 hrs. trip

Fri., Dec. 15, left Bangor for Gander, Newfoundland, and arrived there Fri. afternoon about 12:30, 4 hr. trip, very cold, good food.

Sat., Dec. 16, at Gander.

Sun., Dec. 17, at Gander prepared for take-off about 00:50, Mon. morning for Azores.

Mon., Dec. 18, Flew all night, about 8 hrs. Came through front. Very strong radio beam. The Azores are beautiful from the air. One large mountain, about 7,000 ft., loomed up on one of the islands. When we landed, we were directed a long way around the landing strip to a parking place. The people are Portugese, bare, tough feet. Ox-carts carrying stones. Every white-washed stone house has a stone wall about 4 ft. high around it and the yard. Land is somewhat terraced, and very rich looking. Landing strip was steel mat. We were warned of "Black Death Plague" and Typhoid in towns, but we were not allowed off field. The island jets up from the ocean, with a high wall where the water foams over the rocks. The farm land reaches right out to the edge of the cliff. The weather is mild, with warm breezes. There are many British and Canadian forces here, with many types of British planes- Wellington, Spitfires. There are many C-54's here. Food is very poor, and our sleeping quarters were cots in an old mess hall. USO show very good. This island looks as if time stopped for about 300 years.

Tues., Dec. 19, we prepared to leave for Marrakech, Morroco, in Africa today, but were called back from the line before we could take off. When parking the plane the previous day, a GI was directing us and signaled for turning the plane around and caused us to turn the plane's tail into a ditch. It dented our tail portion on the bottom quite a bit; however, after evaluation of the damage today, it was determined that it was not serious enough to be grounded; but we were delayed until tomorrow for take-off to Marrakech. So, this afternoon, we went to the coast where a cliff jets out of the ocean about 150 ft. We climbed down and around it and met a couple of Portuguese soldiers who had some liquor to sell. They went after some of it and we bargained with them for 2 bottles of Champagne and 1 of Port. Total cost was \$10.00; the Champagne was good, so was the Port.

Wed., Dec. 20, we took off this morning for Marrakech and arrived about 1700. No per diem at this station. E.M. had to get out mess kits. Mess was terrible. Our quarters were French homes used for resorts (we presume). They are quite modern, but all water is cold and we sleep on cots. We drank the bottle of Port wine, split 5 ways, and went to bed.

Thurs., Dec. 21, we awoke about 0730 and were surprised that we hadn't been called at 0500 to leave, however, most of the B-17s stayed and B-24s went. So, we decided we were going to

town or bust! We got our clothes from the plane and got past the guards at the gate, and rode a G.I. bus to town (Marrakech) where we visited the Officers' Club, where Chuck and Johnny killed a month's ration of Martinis. The club was like a palace and was said to have been a Sultan's home previously. Across the road was the Medina, which is a walled-in city of native populace which is off limits. These Arabs (?) are dressed in filthy sheets and bare feet. After leaving the Officers Club, we went to the Magrahb Hotel and ate in the Officer's Mess, which was pretty good. We were not supposed to eat there without a mess pass, but did so anyway, free. We didn't have any trouble getting back on the base either.

Fri., Dec. 22. No flight today, either. Got up about 1100 and went to ship and got clothes again. Ate at Officers' Mess- pretty good. Washed some clothes, wrote letter in evening. Expect to leave tomorrow.

Sat., Dec. 23. Left Marrakech 0705 and flew to Tunis. Ran into rain squall and went down to 1500 feet to stay contact. Saw many ships and 1 sub. One ship challenged us and I answered with Aldus lamp. Arrived in Tunis at 1535 on dirt runways. We are staying in a hotel-like building; no electricity or toilets.

Sun. Dec. 24. Had route briefing, but flight canceled. Looked at wreckage dump; many German, Italian, and American plane wrecks.

Mon., Dec. 25. Christmas. Nice turkey dinner. Went on Red Cross trip to Carthage.

Tues., Dec. 26. Went to the Kasbah in Tunis, Bought some perfume and a metal bowl.

Wed., Dec. 27. Prepared and left for Gioia, Italy. Arrived at Gioia and left plane there.

Thurs., Dec. 28. At Gioia, in tents; cold and wet.

Fri., Dec. 29. Same.

Sat., Dec. 30. Same.

Sun., Dec. 31. Lt. Smith came to Gioia from Foggia and took 2 crews, us and White's and complete baggage in a stripped-down B-17-F to Foggia. That evening we joined a party in the Officers' Club.

Mon., Jan. 1, 1945. We are settled in a tent and ready for combat as part of the 301 Bomb Group, (H), 419 Squadron, APO 520, NY, NY.

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### **13. Combat Flying Tour- 301st Bomb Group, 419th Squadron (01-01-45 to 08-07-45)**

Following is a list of missions (sorties) in which I participated, from official records, with the addition of personal notes that I kept in a small notebook. Note: Sortie on 02-01-45 was missed on my official record.

#### **Sortie #1**

Sunday, Jan. 21, 1945: Vienna, Austria; Florisdorf Marshalling Yards. Flak very intense. Brought back bombs as target was overcast and mickey ships turned back with trouble. 50 odd flak holes all over plane, (9) hour mission; flew as co-pilot with Lt. Unger. Number one engine varied in RPM over target. Temp. -55°C @ 28,000 ft. Plenty scared.

#### **Sortie # (missed on my official record)**

Thursday, Feb. 1, 1945: Vienna, Austria; Mussberbaum. We led group today; our group only one to hit target. Visual bombing, lost two ships, #100 and #736, including Major Muskus, Lts. Dick, Schlarb and Baer. #100 reported going to Russia on two engines. #736 received two direct hits and seen going down. Flak very intense and accurate. Only (4) ships in flyable condition in squadron. All planes that came back were damaged; two ships went off end of runway when hydraulic systems went out. Four

men were wounded, many flak holes. We need new Commanding Officer now.

### **Sortie #2**

Monday, Feb. 5, 1945: Regensburg, Germany; Oil Refineries. Flak very light, undercast. Made 360° on I.P. (Initial Point), but flak failed to come near; nine hour flight. Flew as co-pilot with Lt. Gruden in 1-3 position in high right squadron in ship #551.

Note: On Feb. 7, Sgt. Richard Griffin, our Flight Engineer, flying with another crew, failed to return from a mission over Vienna, Lobalt oil refineries. No reports, except, that they left formation over target in ship #551.

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February 5, 1945, I received a letter from Headquarters, Fifteenth Air Force promoting me from 2nd Lt. to 1st Lt.

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### **Sortie #3**

Thursday, Feb. 8, 1945: Vienna, Austria; S.E. Goods Depot. Flak intense, but not very accurate, undercast, but partially visual, 7½ hours. Flew with Lt. Weinau in 2-3 position. We hit flak two places on way back to base.

### **Sortie #4**

Tuesday, Feb. 13, 1945: Vienna, Austria; Our squadron was leading the group and, as a qualified pilot, I was appointed to fly as observer in the tail-gunner position. Col. Holman was Command Pilot, Capt. Smith was Co-Pilot. We had a total of (9) officers and (3) enlisted men on board. (Please see my separate report that I submitted to Col. Holman after the end of the mission.) On our I.P. approach we were taking heavy flak and clouds were interfering with a visual drop. Lt. Pilcher in 1-3 position was hit; both number 1 and 2 engines were on fire; man tried to bail out, but held onto door and was pushed by another. I saw two chutes altogether; the plane went into a spin. The flak was heavy, intense and accurate. Though we were briefed for Vienna, due to cloud interference, it was decided to bomb Maribor, Yugoslavia, with only (5) planes remaining in our squadron. Flak was heavy and accurate. Target was hit and we received many flak holes in our plane, one right above my head.

On this #4 sortie, the crew was made up of all officers except for the Flight Engineer; which was a Staff Sergeant. The command pilot was Col. Holman, the co-pilot was a Major, the bombardier and navigator were Captains, the radio man was a Lt. Col.; the belly gunner was a 1st Lt., as were the two waist gunners. I was a 2nd Lt. and tail-gunner. My job was to observe the planes in formation behind us and to report to the Command Pilot what problems might occur, how the planes were moving into formation, and inform him via the "intercom radio." The report dated February 13, 1945, was a summary of the activities I observed and reported during the mission, which I submitted to Col. Holman immediately after the mission, or sortie. The original is a penciled sheet of paper, in much the same format shown.

**Report to Col. Holman, Feb. 13, 1945**  
**UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**  
**419 Bombardment Squadron (H)**  
**301 Bomb Group (H)**  
**APO 520, NY, NY.**

**13 February, 1945**

**To:** Col. Holman, Command Pilot, 301st Bomb Group  
**From:** 2nd Lt. Jack Spencer, Observer Tailgunner, 419th Squadron  
**Subject:** Group Assembly at Take-off and Bomb Run, this date.

1. Take-off was on time at 08:10 to the north. Lead squadron was assembled at 08:18 on the downwind leg in good position. High right was picked up 2nd time on down wind, but 2nd element and 3-1 ship lagged behind. Low left 1-3 ship lost engine on take-off roll, but rest of squadron took off in good shape and entire group was in formation the 3rd time over the field; 7 ships in high right and lead, 6 ships in low left.
2. Rendezvous at Termoli was at 09:26½, 30 seconds late. High right and low left were a little too far back and whole group somewhat loose. 2-1 and 3-1 ship in high right continued to lag behind as they did on whole mission.
3. It was decided to hit the target, Vienna, visually, and when high right went into echelon; the second element was too far below and behind position and ran into prop wash of lead squadron. On I.P. (initial point) one ship from another group joined high right and before we went over the target a ship pulled away from high right and was seen to fly far out and level for awhile and was not seen after that. On bomb run whole formation except lead squadron became scattered. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate. Number 1-3 ship in lead squadron was hit; no. 1 and 2 engines were on fire and after an attempt to hold the ship in formation, it pulled away and I saw two men bailout and the plane then went into a spin. High right and low left squadrons dropped on primary target, but lead squadron did not drop, except for 3-1 ship. Rally was to right, but the other two squadrons did not form right away. High right left the formation to return to base and low left pulled up into loose formation and then left to return to base at 12:35. Number 3-1 ship in lead squadron then left and later joined high right. There remained 5 ships in our formation when we went on the I.P. to hit Maribor, (Yugoslavia) number 3 alternate. Target was visual and flak was moderate and accurate hits in the target area were reported. Rally was left and 2-1 ship feathered number 2 engine, but held formation very well all the way back to base.
4. Peeled off over field and landed at 15:10 to the south.

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It was important on a bombing mission that the planes fly in close formation, especially over the target, or when attacked by enemy fighters. This made a greater concentration of bombs near the center of the target, and made it more difficult for the enemy fighter planes to "pick off" a straggler. This was strenuous work for the pilot or co-pilot, since both feet were working the rudder, one hand on the group of 4 throttles, and the other hand controlling the ailerons and elevator. Each pilot would fly 15 minutes on and off. You had to fly very close "on" the wing of the plane forward and to your left or right. Adjustments had to be constantly made; sometimes,

when it was your turn to fly, you might get "vertigo", which prevented your senses of knowing up from down or left from right. The other pilot had to be observant, and seeing this, would tap the vertigo victim on the shoulder and take over. This sensation would quickly leave you, but without help could be serious.

Vertigo was especially serious when flying "on instruments." It would often occur when going in and out of clouds, one second flying visually, the next on instruments. On one mission over Germany our position in the formation was the lowest of all the planes in the group. The lead plane, above the clouds, was probably unaware that we were going in and out of the clouds, in formation. As the clouds thickened, we followed proper procedure and turned 45 degrees away from the formation, and in a few minutes the sky cleared; however, we couldn't find our group. After 15 or 20 minutes of trying to regroup, we decided to abort the mission. We were over enemy territory and could not break radio silence, so we headed back to base looking for a target of opportunity. We dropped our bombs on a bridge; probably of little significance; however, we could not land with a full bomb load and a heavy fuel load due to the possibility of over-stressing the wings.

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#### **Sortie #5**

Friday, Feb. 16, 1945: Munich, Germany; Lechfeld Airdrome, nearby, to be surprise attack on jet aircraft, but target turned out to have slight cloud coverage. It was decided to go to alternate, Hall West, in mountains. We climbed through clouds and came down and hit target well. We flew in 2-3 position with all of our original crew except two. There was heavy, but inaccurate flak over target. We were in the high right squad.

#### **Sortie #6**

Tuesday, Feb. 20, 1945: Vienna, Austria; Florisdorf Oil Refineries; flew in 3-1 position with John Stanger, first pilot, and Chuck Rusza, navigator; balance of crew were unfamiliar. After bomb run there were large clouds of black smoke seen rising from target as we rallied. Flak was pretty heavy; #3 engine was hit in sump, lost oil pressure and prop ran away. Col. Holman said it was the best mission he ever flew. General Twining, Spaatz and Doolittle, and several other generals were at our field as we returned, and we put on a bit of a show in formation.

#### **Sortie #7**

Thursday, Feb. 22, 1945: Buchlve, Germany, in Munich area; a drive on secondary communications targets. I flew with Johnnie Stanger in 3-1 position, were dragged through clouds, lost contact with group, over enemy territory, so bombed a target of opportunity, a bridge; no flak. Returned to base.

#### **Sortie #8**

Saturday, Feb. 24, 1945: Verona, Italy; Although we were briefed on Verona, it was decided that we would hit the railroad marshalling yards at Klagenfurt, Germany. We encountered no flak and bombed visually. I flew with Johnnie and Chuck in 1-3 position in old #902, a very stiff plane. I have blisters on my hand.

#### **Sortie #9**

Tuesday, Feb. 27, 1945: Augsburg, Germany; Target was railroad marshalling yards. Flak was heavy, intense, but inaccurate. Flew with crew in #658. We indoctrinated it (a new plane) to flak, (3) holes.

It was a visual run.

#### **Sortie #10**

Thursday, March 1, 1945: Moosebierbaum, Germany; We flew over this target, but PFF could not pick it up, so we proceeded to #6 alternate, Maribor, Yugoslavia, railroad marshalling yards. We made (2) 360° approaches before visually dropping our bombs.

#### **Sortie #11**

Sunday, March 4, 1945: Linz, Germany; We were briefed on this target, however, it was decided to go to Zagreb, Yugoslavia, to hit R.R. marshalling yards, an alternate. We visually dropped our bombs. Flak was heavy, but inaccurate. One ship in our group was shot down.

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March 7, 1945; for ". . . meritorious achievement in aerial flight while participating in sustained operational activities against the enemy between the dates of 21 January to 16 February, 1945," I was awarded the Air Medal. By command of Major General Twining.

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#### **Sortie #12**

Friday, March 9, 1945: Bruck, Austria; We were briefed on this target, however, we could not see this target or the alternate target visually; neither could we use PFF, so we had to bring bombs back. Ship #352 lost (3) engines and had to either bail out or ditch in the Adriatic. Col. Holmes gave us credit for this mission, even though we didn't bomb the target.

#### **Sortie #13**

Tuesday, March 13, 1945: Regensburg, Germany; After briefing, as we climbed into our places in plane #445, one of the crew wondered whether this was a lucky day. He pondered that  $4+4+5 = 13$ , which also is today's date. The target was railroad marshalling yards. On the bomb run, I saw one close burst of flak with the red flames and black smoke from it. That was an 88. We also saw some 105 white bursts, high and inaccurate. There are only 43 guns there now. This was a PFF run. Our own crew (enlisted men) went to rest camp for a few days at Bari, Italy, yesterday, and we had Lt. Starkey's crew. They aren't near as good as our crew.

Note: On the week of March 15-23, John Stanger (First Pilot), Chuck Rusza (Navigator), Don Dawson (Bombardier), and I (Co-Pilot), were driven by army truck to Naples where we were taken by boat to the Isle of Capri, for Rest Camp. This was a beautiful spot, away from the ravages of war, for a few days. We all enjoyed it very much.

#### **Sortie #14**

Monday, April 2, 1945: Graz, Austria; We bombed the rolling stock in marshalling yards, visually. Flak was heavy, but rather inaccurate for our squadron, but very accurate for others. We flew with most all of our crew.

#### **Sortie #15**

Sunday, April 8, 1945: Bressono, Italy; We were briefed to bomb a railroad bridge; no visual sighting, so, after a 360° turn over that target, we finally dropped on an alternate target, but missed the target.

**Sortie #16**

Thursday, April 12, 1945: Northern Italy, Padua near Bolzano; Target was railroads. We were in 1-3 position and, after dropping our bombs, we came across flak that was fairly accurate at many spots on the rally. We encountered bad weather conditions on the way back to base.

Note: Today, April 12, 1945, as we landed and were ready to get out of our plane, a B-17 came in for landing on three engines, overshot the field, demolished two C-47s (TCC), damaged two others, besides completely demolishing itself. All men in the plane got out miraculously, however, the explosions and fires that resulted were unapproachable. Two men who were in the nose of one of the C-47s, watching the planes land, were killed.

**Sortie #17**

Sunday, April 15, 1945: Northern Italy in area of Bologna; We were in fragmentation formation, 2-1 position in a camera ship. High right got moderate flak. We bombed just beyond the 5th and 8th Army lines. We were low left. (Edit note- This was against enemy ground troops).

**Sortie #18**

Tuesday, April 17, 1945: Northern Italy in area of Bologna; Same area as on April 15, in 1-2 position, deputy lead, with K.C. Smith. We were high right and got flak.

**Sortie #19**

Thursday, April 19, 1945: Rattenberg, Austria; 25 miles N.E. of Innsbruck. Target was a bridge. Flew with Black in camera ship #259. Flak was slightly heavy, but inaccurate, however, two engines were damaged, and we landed on two engines. We counted 451 big holes in the plane.

**Sortie #20**

Saturday, April 21, 1945: Area of Rosenheim, Austria; Target was marshalling yards at Attnang Panchieu. There was no flak, however, the weather was very bad for flying.

**Sortie #21**

Tuesday, April 24, 1945: Northern Italy; Target was a R.R. bridge at Kolbnitz. We made two 360°s over the target, no flak. Flew with Lt. Beaver in 2-3 position.

**Sortie #22**

Thursday, April 26, 1945: Northern Italy, Bolzano area; Target was undercast; could not get visual sighting; there were 106 guns (anti-aircraft). We brought our bombs back.

Please note: Although, due to a mix-up, 22 Sorties show as a total; actually I participated in 23 Sorties.

Wednesday, May 2, 1945, 8:00 P.M.

Announcement has come over the radio that the Krouts have surrendered unconditionally in all of Italy and part of Austria. All of our firearms were immediately picked up by the Q-M Supply. I presume this is to keep celebrationists from hurting anyone. I am of mixed emotions tonight; joyful that the Germans have surrendered, but cognizant of the great war yet going on in the South Pacific.

The last six days have been "stand-down;" presumably because of the weather. There was a battle order made out for tomorrow, but notice was made later of stand-down. I suppose the target was in the Bologna area.

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May 2, 1945; for " . . . meritorious achievement in aerial flight while performing an act of merit against the enemy between the dates of 20 February to 8 April, 1945." I was awarded First Oak Leaf Cluster (Bronze). By command of Major General Twining.

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Battles and Campaigns: Rhineland, Po Valley, Northern Apennines, and Balkans.  
Decorations and Citations: EAME Ribbon with 4 Bronze Stars; Air Medal with 1 Oak Leaf Cluster.

Also, note, that we learned that our Flight Engineer, Richard Griffin, survived his plane being brought down on February 7, 1945, and was taken prisoner by the Germans after parachuting. His home was in Utah and in the mid-sixties he visited me at our family home when we lived in Ortonville, Michigan.

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June 10, 1945: A Western Union Cable message came to me addressed to Mack Spencer, stating "glad to know you are safe and well." An obvious mix-up, however, knowing that my wife was expecting a baby, I assumed it had happened, but didn't know until later from a letter from Gerry that it was a girl. She was named Carol Lynne.

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July 7, 1945: With one of our group's well-worn B-17s, John Stanger, I and (11) other airmen departed Italy for the US. I can't recall why others of our crew were not included as on the way over. We retraced the route we had used previously flying over to the war area.

July 8, 1945: At the Azores Island, we all signed my "Short Snorter," which is a five dollar bill, part of "escape money," which all air crew had been given during combat, so that if shot down, landing in enemy territory, could be used to get help. The whole world, friend or foe, respected and wanted American money. The balance of escape money was turned in to Quartermaster later at our destination.

July 11, 1945: We landed at Bradley Field, Conn., turned in some equipment, and were told that most of our equipment was being sent to Soix Falls, S. Dakota, where we were to train in B-29s after a leave.

July 16, 1945: After some processing, and goodbye to John Stanger, I left Bradley Field and traveled by train, to Ft Sheridan, IL, expecting a leave for a few days, then, anticipating orders to go to B-29 training in South Dakota. As it turned out, I had enough points to get separation, so that I received terminal leave until August 7, 1945, which meant that I was relieved from active duty on that latter date.

#### **14. Reserve Duty Service- (08-08-45 to 06-07-55)**

Since my separation from active duty started on 08-08-45, I began Reserve Duty that day, and soon

began attending meetings as a reserve officer.

On May 4, 1951, I received a letter from Headquarters, Tenth Air Force, Selfridge Air Force Base, MI indicating that I was promoted to Captain, US Air Force Reserve.

On June 7, 1955, I was relieved from reserve duty status as Captain in the Air Force Reserve, as a result of my "unqualified, voluntary resignation." This was a decision made as a result of Air Force Headquarters' demand to either resign or become on active reserve status.

For the record, my serial numbers: Enlisted: 16114008. As officer: O-830731. My MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was 1024 Pilot, Four Engine. In the 15th Air Force, Italy, as Co-Pilot, my MOS was 1051.

In summary, Battles and Campaigns: Rhineland, Po Valley, Northern Apennines, and Balkans.

Decorations and Citations: EAME Ribbon with 4 Bronze Stars; Air Medal with 1 Oak Leaf Cluster.

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Note: The brevity of description of many of the foregoing training locations and dates, including details, is due to a lack of complete records and memory to elaborate more accurately.

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