

TWO DOWN AND TWO TO GO-ON

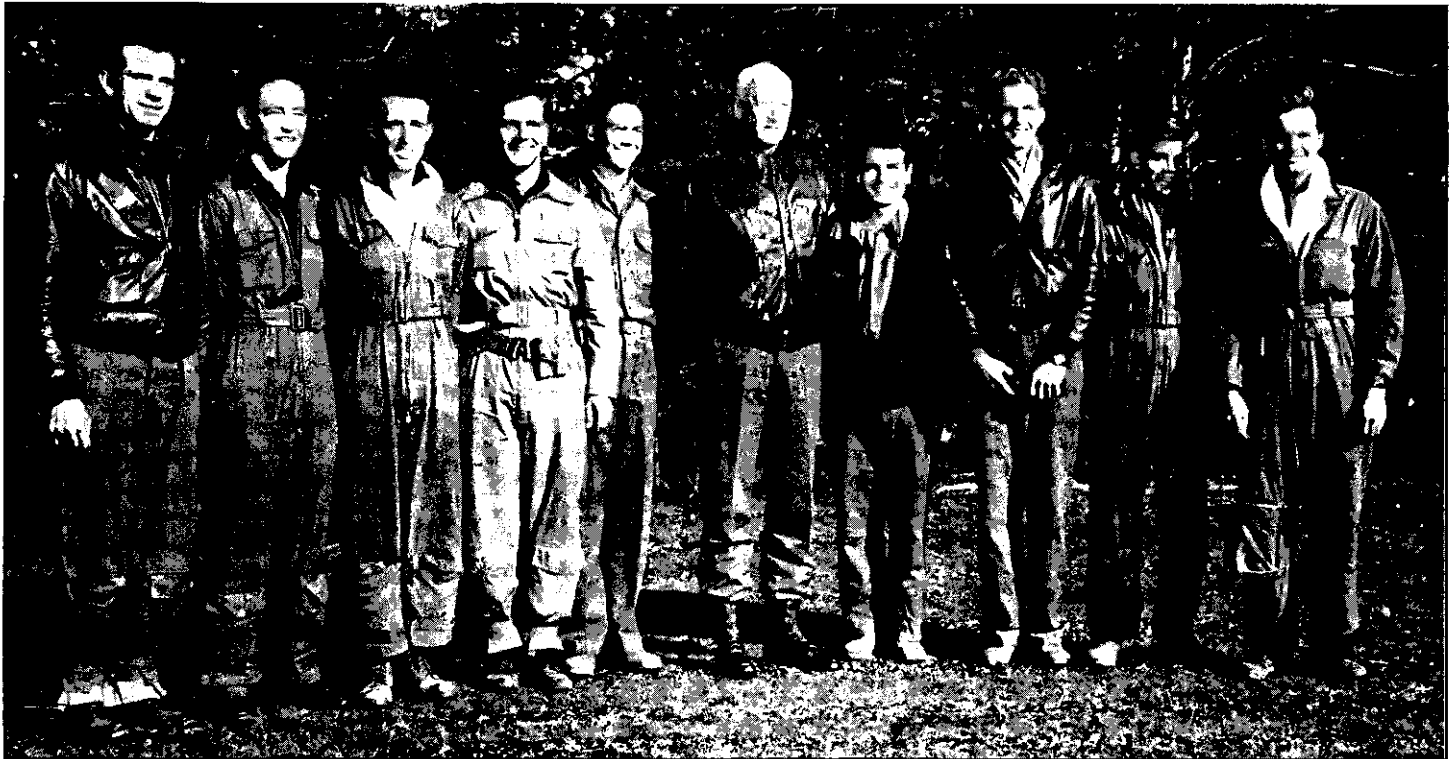
On September 10, 1944, the 92nd Bomb Group participated with other groups on the 1st Bombardment Division to send 372 B-17's into Germany to bomb industrial targets of motor transport factories, aircraft factories and jet engine factories. The 92nd Bomb Group was assigned a target along with other groups that together totalled 72 planes, to bomb the Sindelfinger Aircraft Engine Factory, located in the Stuttgart area.

After a breakfast fit for combat flyers, topped off with toast and orange marmalade (with sweat bees), we proceeded to the next preliminaries such as briefing and check-outs, parachute, harness and escape kits, etc.. This all seemed very routine for an experienced crew with 10 missions behind us, some hard ones and some not so hard, but all with too much flak. We assembled over the English countryside, covered with its usual early morning fog and mist at an altitude high enough for clear skies and sunshine. We joined the other groups and crossed the channel in our route to the target. Over the channel I noticed our number 3 engine had

an oil leak that had accumulated about a foot long runner of what looked like frozen oil. As flight engineer, I reported this to the pilot, Lt. Horace L. Spencer. On one of our previous missions I had observed a similar oil streak that grew to about 3 or 4 feet, then we lost control of the propeller which began to windmill. The pilot was able to cope with it and eventually had it feathered and, of course, we had one less engine to operate with. The decision was made to proceed and if we lost the use of the engine, we would proceed with 3 engines to the target. Now this was no big thing at this point in as much as on previous occasions we had lost as many as three engines before finally landing the aircraft. None of us wanted to waste all the effort on an abortion and we were all eager to proceed as directed.

When we reached the I. P. heavy flak was evident by black clouds from that point on, and we were immediately under fire and received a direct hit in the #4 engine. The pilot feathered #4

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The names of those in the photo from left to right are: 2nd Lt. Paul K. Bupp, 1st Lt. Horace L. Spencer, Sgt. John P. Hensley, 2nd Lt. Harry J. McCrossan, Jr., Sgt. Leslie G. Spillman, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., Staff Sgt. John L. Houk, Staff Sgt. Thomas F. Jenkins, Staff Sgt. Jack Spratt, 2nd Lt. Sargent J. Abelman.

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TWO DOWN *(continued from page 6)*

and began to increase the power of the remaining 3 engines in order to hold our position in the formation. As soon as this was done our #3 engine (that had been leaking oil) went out, also, and it was feathered. We still had our load of bombs, approximately 3 tons. We could not maintain our position in the formation and had to get out of formation as we were losing altitude. There were no enemy fighters in the area. The 8th Air Force had sent 1,145 planes to 10 or 11 different targets on this day. I doubt if the Nazis could decide where to go and what to defend, but at this time we were glad that we did not have them to contend with as we became intensely busy with our own aircraft.

The Bombardier was told to get rid of the bombs and the crew was told to lighten the load by throwing out all detachable articles. The Pilot was getting all he could from the two engines and still was losing altitude. It was pointed out that we should stay close to our parachutes and be ready for a bail out order. It was at this time that I discovered that my chest type chute would not sit on the hooks provided, one of the hooks having been bent so that the eye on the chute did not have enough room to slip through.

Lt. Harry J. McCrossan, our Bombardier, located a large warehouse and by coordination with the pilot, scored a direct hit on the German warehouse sending lots of black smoke high into the sky.

We had been told that as soon as we had gone as far as the plane would go, we would abandon it so we were maintaining control of the aircraft as long as we could nose it down for enough speed to keep it flying.

The crew had been working desperately trying to salvo the ball turret. The kit containing the special wrenches was not on the plane and we tried to break the gear ring with the barrels of the guns and we used them with all the strength we could muster. It felt like the barrels of the guns would bend as we hit the turret. As we finally realized the futility of this, L. G. Spillman had located a parachute harness that had been found on the plane. He held it while I made a quick change. The new harness was down to my knees and much too large, but the chute hooks worked.

We had been getting a lot of small arms fire from pockets of German soldiers as we were crossing the Siegfried Line. Our #2 engine had been burning and would go out, and then start up again, but now it was burning more and not going out. We were now waiting for the pilot's order to bail out and it came after we had used all the altitude available. Bail out was conducted in a most orderly fashion, all gunners exited the waist door and the navigator, Sargent Abelman, went out with us. The bombardier and pilots went out the pilot door. Lt. Spencer, the last to leave the plane, put it into a condition to cause a stall and then bailed out, only a few hundred feet from the ground. We had started going out at about 800 feet. When Spencer's chute opened he hit the ground. All of us were uncomfortably close to the ground and there was not time to wait for the chute to come out and several of us helped the chutes out of the packs. When my chute opened, all the loose harness slack was taken up and I was snapped with my chin hitting low on my chest bone. We had to help Sgt. Spratt down out of a tree. All of us were in good shape as we got back together. We tried to find out where we were. There was visibility for a long way and we saw a man on a bicycle about 200 yards from us. No one else was in sight. McCrossan and I ran over to him, not knowing whether it would be a German or French or what, but we were ready for whatever we had to cope with. As luck would have it, he was a young French boy about 15 or 16, and he told us that the Germans were one way and the Americans were the other way, and no one had yet occupied the area we were in.

P51's began to buzz us. They had apparently been furnishing us cover and one by one, they buzzed us, all in the same direction of the American forces, but we did not know this. We then decided to go over to where the plane hit. Lt. Spencer and Lt. Bupp had not yet joined us and we thought that might be where they would come to. There was very little left of the plane. The largest piece was a wheel strut. The plane had made it through some very

rough treatment and got us back to safety. The crew chief of the ground crew was heart broken when we told him what happened to his plane. The name of the plane was "Homesick Angel". Jack Spratt had found an odd looking piece of metal which he kept for a souvenir, and Sgt. Houk, the radio operator, located a piece of the antenna.

A Piper Cub landed nearby and Lt. Col. Murray came to us and explained exactly where we were and what was going on. Lt. Spencer and Lt. Bupp had now joined us. Spencer buried all his personal items in the woods along with his parachute. When he saw the plane land he was sure it was alright to come out and join us. Col. Murray was from 3rd Army Headquarters and radioed back for someone to transport us back to their headquarters. A Frenchman by the name of Drouin asked us to stay at his place until our transportation arrived. He was very nice to us, giving us some food and drink. They lived in a large nice home just west of the Meuse River. The Germans had pulled back a long way and Patton was not able to take over for lack of fuel and maps and other supplies.

Soon a couple of jeeps arrived and we were on our way to 3rd Army Headquarters. From this time on I wished all our friends from the 92nd Bomb Group could have been with us. Our first stop was at the mess tent where we ate kraut and drank champagne. This was Sept. 10th and the 3rd Army had units battling at the fortress of Metz and being successful there, they had captured warehouses filled with champagne and cognac. Patton was about to cross the Mozelle River at this time and there was a lot of resistance from the Germans. Some of his troops were already on the other side of the river but could go no further due to the shortage of fuel and maps, and the reluctance of high command to give him a go-ahead.

Bing Crosby was at the Headquarters area and Marlene Dietrich was also there. They had given their show before we got there. The Red Cross was set up with coffee and donuts and a lot of good company.

Col. Murray let us use his tent for the night. Going to sleep was no problem and we slept late and went to the mess tent for breakfast. There was more champagne there and a shortage of water, and no milk, of course. Bing Crosby came by for breakfast and visited with us awhile. Shortly after this, we were summoned to the Headquarters tent of General Patton who was very pleased with what the Air Corps had been doing and felt that he should give us a medal for destroying the German warehouse. He was very nice to us and told us that he was sending someone to London in his plane and that we could get a ride back to England and our base. We rode from Headquarters to his airplane, a C-47, in a limousine type Cadillac with General Hobart Gay and one of the Red Cross ladies. They had loaded the plane with a case each of cognac and champagne for us. It wasn't long until we were landing at Podington. Needless to say, we were a happy bunch to be back at Podington.

Lt. Spencer's crew went on to finish all their missions and were returned to the States with exception of yours truly who was wounded in the right leg on the next mission and returned to the States in January, 1945.

Thomas Fred Jenkins, 326th Sqd.

Note: If anyone knows the whereabouts or current addresses of Lt. Horace Spencer, Lt. Paul Bupp, or Sgt. John Hensley, please advise. My address is 3068 Emerald, Memphis, TN 38115 ■



What is the occasion for this photo? Lt./Col. Griffith 1st front row left, Lt/Col. Keck last front row right. Courtesy of Les Crecelius (407).