



Lt. Austin Spencer - A Basking Ridge MIA Story

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Lt. Austin Pendleton Spencer - US Navy - Call sign "Spike"



This story came about after the Mr. Local History Project researchers prepared research on Bernards Township developments in the 20th century. Many residents started asking about the Spencer Road development, one of the first in the township to provide lower-income homes for veterans returning from WW2. Spencer Road was one of the township's first large-scale developments with a few of the area's developers.

Coincidentally, Mr. Local History's founder and his family moved to Basking Ridge in 2004, and guess where they chose to live? YES, Spencer Road.

Austin Pendleton Spencer - US Navy

Austin Pendleton Spencer was born in Colchester, Connecticut, on January 17, 1918. He was raised as the eldest of four siblings, Emily, Alice, and Trueman Jr., in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, and grew up on West Oak Street, across from today's Oak Street Elementary School.



Austin grew up in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, on W. Oak Street.

Austin attended Bernards High School from 1931 to 1935, as there was no high school in Basking Ridge, where he lived. He graduated from Bernards High School in 1935.

From 1936 to 1940, Spencer attended Willimantic State Teachers College and Connecticut State College (UConn), graduating from the University of Connecticut in May 1940. Austin's father, Trueman, also graduated from the same college in 1915. In 1940, the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Connecticut. Connecticut State College officially became the University of Connecticut on July 1, 1939, following the approval of a bill by the Connecticut General Assembly on May 26, 1939. This name change reflected the institution's growth and expanded academic offerings.



1939 - Willimantic State Teacher College Yearbook where he got his nickname "Spike" which would become his call sign at the USN.



AUSTIN PENDLETON SPENCER

Colchester

Bacteriology

Alpha Phi

“Spike” . . . Keeper of the Comm House . . .
Intra-mural football flash . . . “Ceaseless cocci
chaser” . . . Nature in the raw is invigorating
. . . Appears bashful to the world at large . . .
Possessed of a sly humor . . . Outing Club, 1, 2, 3.

1 9 3 7 N U T M E G



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ROBERT MATHESON

ALEXANDER MILNE
HERBERT PETERSON
ANDREW PUPILLO
FRANK ROBINSON
RENATO SPADOLA
AUSTIN SPENCER



1937 Connecticut State College Nutmeg Yearbook

Wedding Vows

On August 2, 1942, in the coastal town of Wickford, Rhode Island, Austin exchanged vows with Agnes Gerard Kennedy, a devoted schoolteacher originally from St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Their union took place in the shadow of a world at war, a time when personal milestones were often intertwined with global events.

Agnes had come to the United States pursuing educational and professional opportunities, bringing with her the resilience and warmth that defined her Newfoundland upbringing. Steady and determined, Austin was drawn to her intellect and unwavering sense of purpose. Their wedding was a modest yet joyful occasion, marked by close friends, family, and the palpable uncertainty of wartime America.

Not long after the ceremony, Spencer, inspired by a sense of duty and the momentum of his time, promptly enlisted in the United States Navy.

WWII Navy Enlistment

Austin began his pilot training in Jacksonville, Florida, where he leveraged his college nickname to become his call sign "Spike" Spencer. After achieving his pre-war Aviation Cadet (AVCAD) program credentials, Spencer became a naval aviator. Spencer held the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade and the service number 0099935, piloting Lockheed PV-1 bombers in search missions across the North Atlantic.

SERIAL NUMBER 3677		1. NAME (Print) Austin Pendleton Spencer		ORDER NUMBER 6546	
2. ADDRESS (Print) WEST OAK STREET BASKING RIDGE, SOMERSET NEW JERSEY					
3. TELEPHONE BERNARDSVILLE 895		4. AGE IN YEARS 22		5. PLACE OF BIRTH COLCHESTER CONNECTICUT	
6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U.S.A.		7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mr. Trouman Howe Spencer			
8. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON West Oak Street Basking Ridge Somerset New Jersey		9. EMPLOYER'S NAME Peter Dronin			
10. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Rockwood Amusement		11. SIGNATURE Austin Spencer			

Austin Spencer's Military Registration Card



Austin's lost plane - the Lockheed PV-1 bomber.

While piloting a Lockheed PV-1 bomber on one of his many submarine search missions in the North Atlantic, Spencer never returned and was eventually declared missing in action on May 1, 1943. A cenotaph memorial for Spencer was dedicated at the Linwood Cemetery in Colchester, Connecticut, commemorating his service and sacrifice. A cenotaph is a monument, or empty tomb, erected to honor a person or group of people whose remains are unrecoverable.

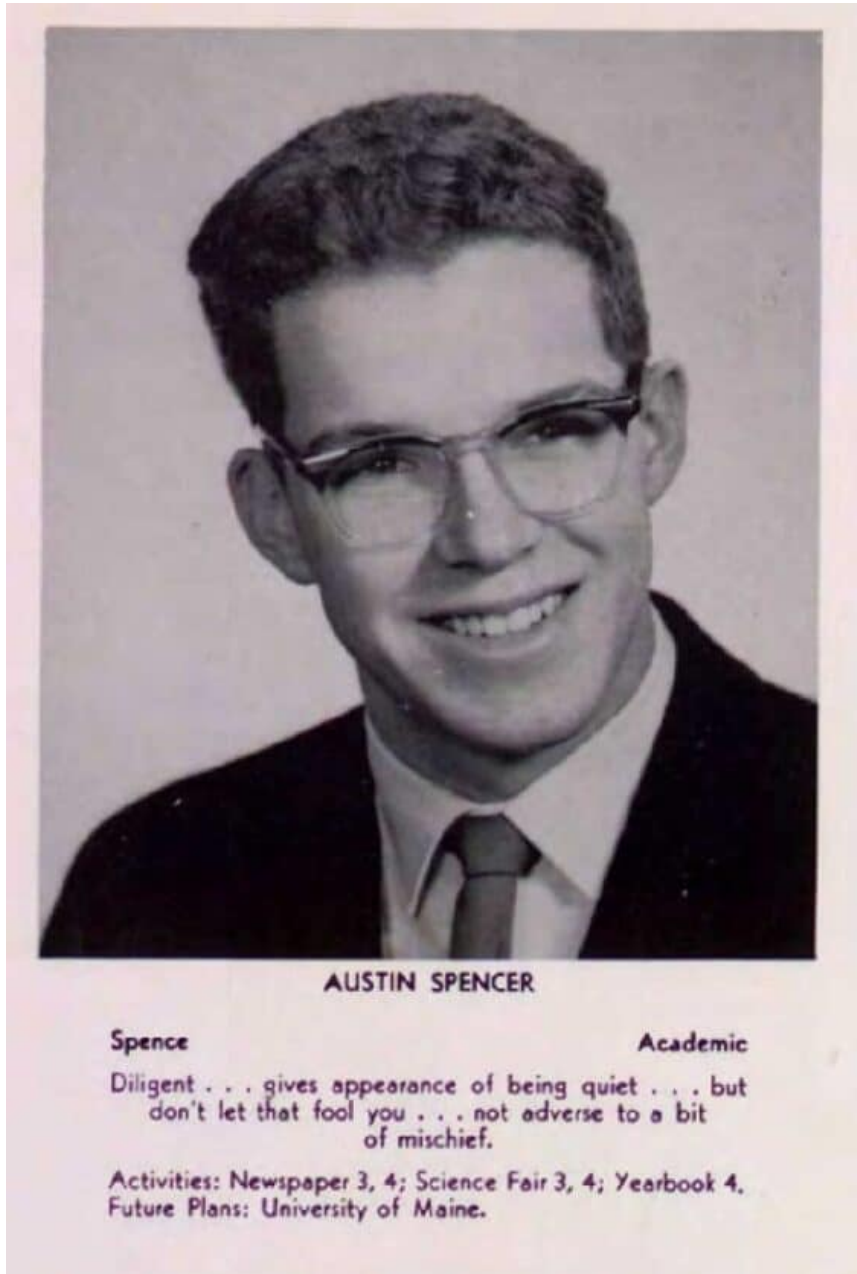


Although his remains were never recovered, a memorial stone exists in his honor alongside his parents. It typically lists where they lived at the time of enlistment. Hence, New Jersey is listed.

This Story Has a Silver Lining

One thing people don't know about Austin is that after he was declared officially MIA on May 1, 1943, his wife Agnes was pregnant. On February 4, 1944, Austin's wife, Agnes Gerard Kennedy Spencer, gave birth to their son, Austin P. Spencer Jr., in Brooklyn, New York.

Austin Spencer Jr. would grow up, marry, and have a son, whom he and his wife, Lorraine, named Austin P. Spencer (III). So while our MIA story ended tragically, there are happily two more Austin generations carrying on Austin's name and legacy.



Austin P. Spencer, Jr., born nine months after his father was declared deceased, would grow up, marry Lorraine Allard, and have a baby boy they named Austin Spencer III.

MIA's Sister Follows in Footsteps

It was interesting that as I was searching for more information about Austin's parents, I found this about Austin's younger sister Alice Clarice Spencer, who, at just 25, became the first woman Veteran to earn her pilot's license at Basking Ridge's Somerset Hills Airport. After receiving her license, she would later that year marry Walter Van Horne at the US Naval Air Station in Alameda, California, where she was based. She graduated from Bernards High (as there was no high school in Bernards Township then). She also had a younger



brother, Trueman Jr., an older sister, Emily, and her oldest brother, Austin.



Austin's sister Alice left her autograph in the garage.

Austin's younger sister Alice Spencer, 25, became the first woman veteran to acquire her private pilots license as part of the G.I. Flight Training Program at Basking Ridge's [Somerset Hills Airport](#).

Bernardsville News, June 26, 1947



ALICE SPENCER WINS LICENSE TO FLY

**Daughter of Township Tax Collector
Becomes First Woman Veteran to
Earn License at Ridge Airport.**

A former Wave is among eight pilots to receive licenses recently under the G.I. flight training program, it was announced last week by the Somerset Hills Airport, Basking Ridge.

The woman is Alice Spencer of West Oak street, Basking Ridge. A spokesman for the airport said she is the first woman veteran to qualify at the field for a private pilot's license.

The daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Truman H. Spencer, Miss Spencer served three years in the Waves as an aviation machinist mate. Most of the time she was stationed at Floyd Bennett Field, the New York Naval Air Station. She is a graduate of Bernards High School. Her father is Bernards Township tax collector.

Others to receive licenses include: Robert Cannon, Harold B. Thomson, Robert Moffett, all Basking Ridge; Donald Duguid, Milington; Kenneth Oppel, New Vernon.

Student veterans include: George Melise, Stirling; Ernest Bittman, Gillette; Donato Megarro, Stirling; Ernest Cummings, Mt. Horeb; Charles Hobbie, Mendham; Edward Perkins, Basking Ridge; Roy and William Shand, Gillette; Ray Simpson, Martinsville; Thomas Thorn, Basking Ridge and Ronald McVickar, Bernardsville. McVickar is district traffic manager for the Northwest Air Lines.



Bernardsville News, June 26, 1947

For women, the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). Approved by Congress and signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1942, the WAVES program recruited women between 18 and 36 years old (and officers between 20 and 50) to serve onshore in the continental United States. Many of these women started in 1944. Women maintained aircraft, tested parachutes, were domestic air traffic controllers and weather specialists, and trained men in navigation and gunnery. The WAVES trained male celestial navigators using one of the most sophisticated training devices of the time, the Link Celestial Navigation Trainer. WAVES was integrated into the regular Navy in 1948 with the Women's Armed Services Integration Act.

Coincidence or Destiny

Interestingly, we learned that the home Austin Spencer grew up in in the 1930s actually has another "Austin" living in the same house. The owners reached out to let us know. This time, we're glad this **"Austin came home."**

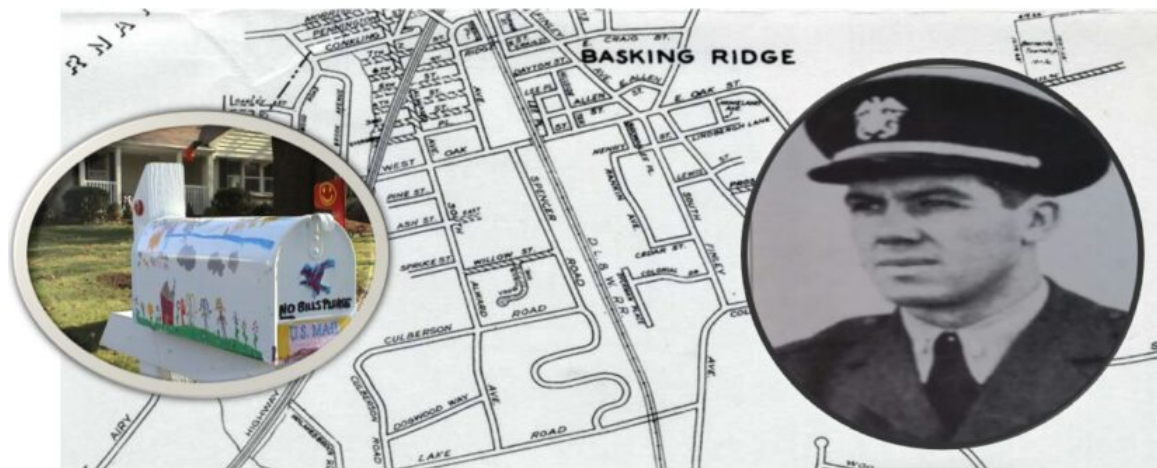


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