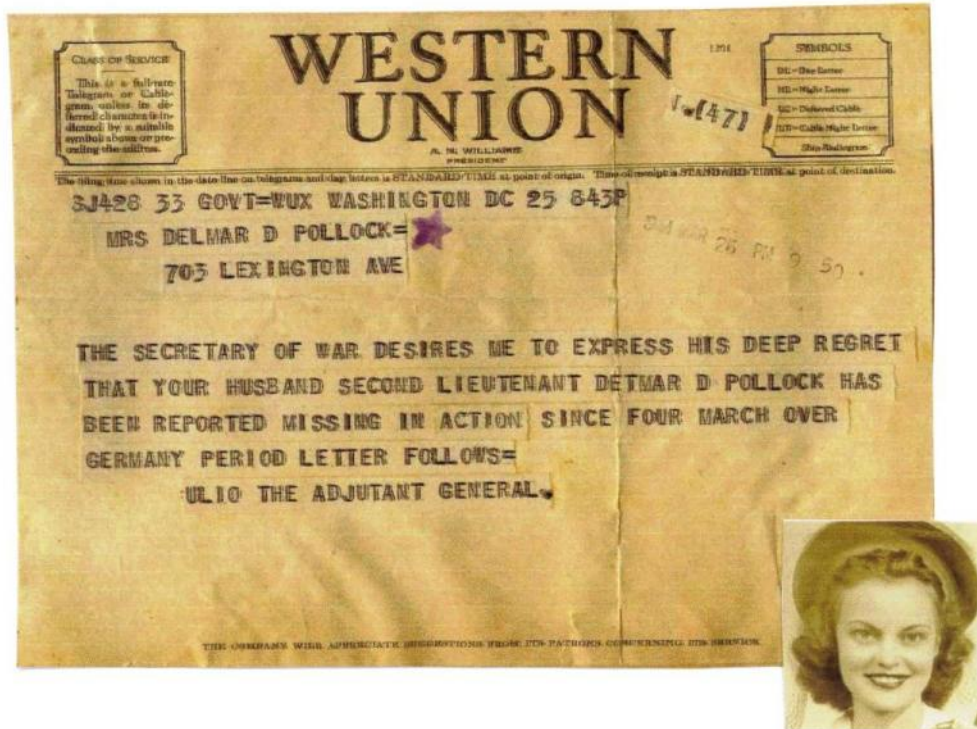


THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET...

March 4, 1944

Narrative written by R. L. Hopkins, WWII Historian for the 94th Bomb Group
In collaboration with Bettye Weigand Pribyl, niece of D. D. Pollock



This laconic message, typical of thousands like it, concealed a world of human drama. Misspelled and misleading, it reached Mrs. D. D. Pollock, Kathleen, in Laredo, Texas, long after the event, offering a thread of hope...forlorn hope, as we shall see.

Delmar D. "Bud" Pollock had died at about a quarter to eleven on a cloudy Saturday morning, March 4, 1944, almost three weeks earlier.



Delmar Dale Pollock

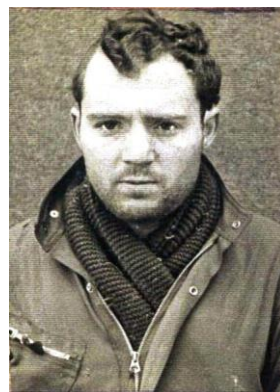
He was flying on the extreme right of his group.¹ Echeloned away to his left, were the other 17 B-17s in his formation. Up ahead and at a higher altitude was the lead group of his Combat Wing. They were all part of a bomber stream more than 500 strong hoping to become the first Americans to strike the capital of the Third Reich.

On only his third mission with his own crew, after having flown previously as co-pilot, he was off the right wing of his element² leader, 2nd Lt. James T. Bloyd, while across the way was another friend, 2nd Lt. R. A. Senior, all of the 331st Squadron. Things were deceptively calm.

The undercast was solid, allowing no view of the earth far below. It was noted that the formation was approximately a minute late and slightly off course as it neared the enemy coast some 14 miles north of Dunkerque (Dunkirk). Sporadic flak rose up through the murk, its deadly flowers blossoming randomly, but nothing seemed destined to deter the bombers from their goal, a tiny point on the map hundreds of miles away.

It happened suddenly, it always did. There was a fire in the left wing! Warnings and commands flashed through the interphone system, efforts were made to shut down the flames, and then, the interphone went dead. The fire was spreading rapidly.

Lieutenant Pollock pulled his aircraft, fully laden with bombs and aviation fuel, sharply away from his squadron, standard procedure to protect the formation. He gave the order to bail out just as the plane went into a vertical dive, centrifugal force holding the crew fast. Pollock and co-pilot Warren Van Eschen fought the controls as the burning ship plunged down through the heavy clouds. They managed to steady the plane for a few seconds, allowing Ken Kirker (top turret gunner), Jay Summers (tail gunner), and Walter Stevenson (left waist) time to parachute out. Unfortunately, Summers' 'chute became entangled with the plane and did not deploy. At that point, an explosion ripped the plane apart and, miraculously, blew three more men clear, sparing Ralph Candiotti (bombardier), Bennie Zak³ (navigator), and a badly wounded Warren Van Eschen (co-pilot) the fate of their plane and the four men trapped inside.



Ralph Candiotti



Warren L. Van Eschen



Bennie Zak

Of those who survived, Van Eschen was in the most serious condition. His left leg below the knee was off, the truncated limb bleeding profusely. He was fortunate to land near Walter Stevenson, who was able to collapse the wounded man's 'chute for him and apply a tourniquet made of its shroud lines.⁴

The Germans took little time to arrive on the scene. They rendered first aid and transported four captured airmen (Candiotti, Van Eschen, Zak, and Stevenson) to the hospital in Lille, and in time, to POW camps where they would await the end of hostilities.

Luckiest of the survivors was Kenneth O. Kirker, Jr., who managed to evade capture and encounter elements of the Résistance. He was reported to have had a minor flak wound, most likely the same flak that started the fire. He was taken in by the French and apparently operated with them against the Germans in the Dunkirk area. He eventually attached himself to a Canadian reconnaissance unit, and was returned to England.



A young Kirker

The wreckage came down in two major pieces. The rear section landed near Fort-Mardijk, 5 km west of Dunkerque and very close to the coast. The front of the aircraft came to rest near Grande-Synthe, 8 km southwest of Dunkerque.



William H. Irvin was still in the waist, William G. Grocke was in the ball turret (from which his crewmates were unable to free him), and Gerald Silver was found under the right stabilizer. Bud Pollock was still at the controls of his ship.



Gerald Silver



William H. Irvin, Jr.

All four bodies were moved to the British Military Cemetery at St. Omer-Longuenesse (of WWI fame). Bud Pollock was buried as an “unknown” and remained so until recovered by U.S. personnel and dental records revealed his identity.

The body of Jay W. Summers was never recovered.

The Crew of Aircraft 42-38169, QE-K, “Nobody’s Fool⁵,” 331st Squadron

Pilot: 2nd Lt. Delmar D. **Pollock**, **KIA**, Laredo, Texas
 Co-pilot: 2nd Lt. Warren L. **Van Eschen**, **POW**, Ackley, Iowa
 Navigator: 2nd Lt. Bennie (NMI) **Zak**, **POW**, Detroit, Michigan
 Bombardier: F/O Ralph **Candiotti**, **POW**, Brooklyn, NY
 Top Turret/Engineer: S/Sgt. Kenneth O. **Kirker**, Jr., **EVD**, Youngstown, Ohio
 Radio Operator: S/Sgt. Gerald (NMI) **Silver**, **KIA**, Brooklyn, NY
 Ball Turret: Sgt. William G. **Grocke**, **KIA**, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 Tail Gunner: S/Sgt. Jay W. **Summers**, **KIA**, Bakersfield, California
 Right Waist: S/Sgt. William H. **Irvin**, Jr., **KIA**, Paintsville, Kentucky
 Left Waist: Sgt. Walter G. **Stevenson**, **POW**, Breese, Illinois



*Rear L/R: unident., unident., Irvin, Silver, unident., unident.
Front L/R: Pollock, Van Eschen, Zak (?), Candiotti (?).*

Photo dates from after February 24, 1944, and prior to March 4, 1944.

*All of these men, save the more experienced Pollock and Van Eschen,
were assigned to the 331st Squadron only on February 9, 1944.*

94th Bomb Group, Rougham Field, near Bury St. Edmunds.



**Bud and Kathleen Pollock in happier times.
March 4, 1944, was their 5th wedding anniversary. Had he lived
two more days, Bud would have been 26 years-old.**



Bettye Pribyl of Victoria, Texas, was the driving force behind this study. She marshaled the generous contributions of the families involved and received support from 94th BG research. Here she is shown on August 11, 2006, with a shadow box honoring her uncle, Delmar D. Pollock.

NOTES:

¹ The 94th Bomb Group was flying in the 4th "A" Combat Wing. The 94th provided the lead group and the low group, where Pollock was positioned. The 385th Bomb Group provided the high group.

² An element consisted of three planes in a rough "V."

³ In later life Zak became an illustrious chemist and pioneer in the field of Clinical Chemistry. Dr. Zak received his B.S. and Ph.D. degrees from Wayne State University. After receiving his doctoral degree in 1952, he served as Clinical Chemist for Detroit General Hospital and as Professor of Pathology at Wayne State University School of Medicine until his death in July 2005.

⁴ There is an oral tradition in the Van Eschen family that he landed in the water, the cold stopped his bleeding and he was rescued by the Germans.

⁵ **There is much confusion surrounding this aircraft, its number, and its name. It was definitely number 42-38169, QE-K. Its name was "Wolverine II," but it is thought that the new crew (Pollock's) re-named it when it became "their" plane. The name included in the post-mission summary is "Nobody's Fool."**