

Arthur A. Vogel

WWII GLIDER PILOT

Compiled by Major Leon B. Spencer, USAF (Ret'd) WWII Glider Pilot

Second Lieutenant Arthur A. Vogel. Serial No. 0-1996188, a glider pilot from Menominee, Michigan, was killed on Monday, 23 July 1945, when the Consolidated B-24H Liberator bomber on which he was a passenger crashed on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, ¼ mile north of Stonefield. All five crew members and nine glider pilot passengers died when the aircraft, loaded with 2,700 gallons of aviation fuel, exploded in a huge fireball on impact. Tragically, Lt. Vogel was returning home after surviving two perilous glider combat missions. The other passengers were likewise headed home.

Lt. Vogel had been based at Aldermaston Airfield (AAF Station 467) in England with the 72nd Troop Carrier Squadron, 434th Troop Carrier Group, during his tour of duty in the United Kingdom. Aldermaston was located south of the village of Berkshire, and west of London. Vogel flew the Normandy and Rhine River Crossing missions earning him the Bronze Star and Air Medal with one oak leaf cluster for gallantry in action. His CG-4A glider on D-day, 6 June 1944, was Chalk No. 6. He flew the Operation Varsity on 24 March 1945.

When Vogel volunteered for the glider program in June 1942 he was sent to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, for pre-glider training, graduating on 7 September 1942. He completed advanced glider training at Stuttgart Army Air Base, Arkansas, on 15 March 1943 as a member of Class 43-6, earning him his sterling silver "G" wings and a promotion from Staff Sergeant to Flight Officer, a wartime rank equivalent to a Junior Grade Warrant Officer, with the pay of a Second Lieutenant. He was promoted to Second Lieutenant on 26 October 1944, four months after the Normandy Invasion.

The events leading up to the fatal B-24 crash that took the life of Vogel began at New Castle Army Air Base, Wilmington, Delaware, on 6 July 1945. First Lieutenants William H. Bell, Serial No. 0-679029, the pilot of the aircraft and Theodore E. Lundell, Serial No. 0-711233, the copilot, were members of Squadron "B," Flight 4, 552nd Air Base Unit, New Castle Army Air Base, Delaware, received orders to proceed to Gravelly Point, Washington, D.C. and thence to Prestwick, Scotland to ferry an aircraft back to the Zone of the Interior (the USA).

Operations Order No. 8, dated 6 July 1945, issued by Headquarters, 552nd Air Base Unit (2nd Ferrying Group), Ferrying Division, ATC, New Castle Army Air Base, Delaware, authorized the ferrying mission. The order was signed by Lt. Colonel George E. Katzman, Director of Operations. After delivering the aircraft to Bradley Field, Windsor Locks, Connecticut, the crew members were to return to their home station.

Bell and Lundell were joined in Prestwick, Scotland by the rest of the flight crew, First Lieutenant Albert L. Harmony, Serial No. 0-791753, (navigator), Technical Sergeant E. Hansen, Serial No. 13157791 (flight engineer) and Staff Sergeant Robert R. Bisbing, Serial No. 33057070. (radio operator). Their authorization to travel was covered by Operations

Order Number 17, issued by Headquarters, 561st AAF Base Unit (First Operational Training Unit), Ferrying Division, ATC, Rosencrans Field, St. Joseph, Missouri, dated 6 July 1945. The order was signed by Lt. Colonel Wilburt J. Sutton, Jr., Director of Operations.

When Bell and Lundell arrived at Prestwick they learned that the aircraft they were to ferry, a B-24H, Serial No. 41-29369, was located at Burtonwood Air Depot #2, in Warton, England, so they proceeded there to check out the aircraft. After a thorough inspection they flew the aircraft to the RAF Airfield at Valley, Wales, arriving there on 21 July 1945. After having the aircraft serviced Bell planned to depart for the ZI on 23 July 1945. The B-24 was not new to Bell. He had over 596 hours in this model aircraft and over 800 hours as a pilot. On the day of their arrival the operations officer at RAF Valley informed Bell that they would have nine passengers on the flight to the states.

Outlined below is a list of the glider pilot passengers returning to the ZI:

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Home Address</u>
F/O	Eads, Eldo E	T-767	43-4	Los Angeles, CA
2/Lt	Vogel, Arthur A,	0-1996168	43-6	Menominee, MI
F/O	Fenik, Stephen A,	T-121320	43-4	Cleveland, OH
F/O	Fleak, Marvin (NMI)	T-122442	43-14	Columbus, OH
F/O	Grzesiek, Edward	T-121525	43-5	Detroit, MI
F/O	Baker, George W.	T-1080	43-4	Cartersville, GA
F/O	Stanley, Newton D.	T-122387	43-13	Melrose, MA
F/O	Titus, Wilber L.	T-1269	43-4	Johnson, VT
F/O	Ruszala, Edward J.	T-60842	43-3	Elizabeth, NJ

Lt. Bell reported to base operations early on the morning of departure to file his aircraft clearance. Because of the inclement weather that morning he was obligated to file an IFR (Instrument Flight Rules) clearance. The weather officer reported the ceiling was 200 to 300 feet, visibility from 1,400 feet to 2 miles, with drizzling rain. Bell planned to depart Valley at 1030 hours British Summer Time (BST) for Stornoway, Rekkjavik, cruising at 8,000 feet, and thence to Meeks Island at the same flight level. No other flight information was furnished on the Aircraft Clearance Form.

The aircraft is presumed to have taken off on time and had reached no further than the Isle of Skye when the accident occurred. Donald McDonald, an eyewitness to the event gave the following account of the crash.

“I first saw the aircraft coming across the bay from the south. It was in a wide sweeping turn and losing altitude. I saw that the left side of the aircraft seemed to be on fire. There was a reddish glow. Just as the aircraft crossed the beach the tail section fell off. When the tail fell off the aircraft nosed over and lost altitude quickly. The force of the aircraft on impact forced the airplane in a northerly direction. The bomber exploded in one big flash when it hit the ground. I arrived at the scene within five minutes of the crash. No one was alive.”

The Aircraft Accident Report, signed by the six officers on the Accident Review Board, gave the following account of the crash:

“The airplane was in a wide sweeping turn to the right out over the water and headed towards land. Just as the airplane crossed the beach the left wing section of the No. 1 engine, which was on fire, broke off, and in breaking off knocked the complete tail section off the B-24. The aircraft immediately assumed a steep angle and exploded upon contact

with the ground. The tail section was found half a mile from the wreckage and the wing section about a mile from the wreckage. The wing section showed evidence of burning off and the tail section showed evidence of being knocked off.

Note: As indicated above the flames from the engine fire obviously burned through the aluminum wing structure causing it to break off. What is surprising is that no radio call was received from the stricken aircraft about the engine fire which must have burned for some time.

Data Source:

- (1) B-24H, Serial No. 41-29369, Accident Report No. 33337, dated 1 August 1945.