

VF-20/P6

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET

AIR FORCE

Serial: 73

FIGHTING SQUADRON TWENTY

c/o Fleet Post Office,
San Francisco, California,
3 May 1944.

Mr. Roy Spears,
518 N. Hightower,
Altus, Oklahoma.

Dear Mr. Spears,

It is with the deepest regret that I had to inform you concerning your son, Edward. He was sincere, cheerful, hardworking and a thoroughly reliable pilot who had become a very real part of the squadron. His loss has come as a profound shock to all of us who were looking forward to having him in the squadron as long as we are together. We shall miss him keenly as a flier and a friend.

Ed is listed as missing as the result of a mid-air collision. He was participating in a gunnery exercise which called for coordinated attacks on a towed target. During one of the attacks his plane collided with a plane piloted by Ensign G. A. Wilbur, which was making a run from a different direction. The impact was necessarily severe and both planes were badly broken up.

Attacks of this kind are dangerous in that they require extremely close timing, and although none of the other pilots saw the actual crash, it is believed that Ed and Ensign Wilbur misjudged each others path of flight until too late to avoid the crash.

Lieutenant Lillard, who was leading the flight, and Ensign Cox, Ed's team leader at the time, both followed the planes down to the water in order to give such help as they could in case either Ed or Ensign Wilbur bailed out. They reported that one badly ripped parachute was seen to open and later they spotted a rubber life boat on the water, but there did not appear to be anyone in it. They circled the life boat and continued to search, without success, for signs of the other pilot. A short time later a seaplane arrived at the scene and picked up the life boat but failed to recover the pilot who was in the water under the life boat and already apparently dead. The crew of the seaplane reported that they were able to catch only a fleeting glimpse of the body before it sank, and that under the circumstances identification was impossible.

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Surface craft and additional planes continued to search the area throughout the day for signs of the other pilot but failed to find any traces of him.

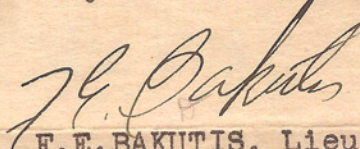
Since one of the pilots failed to jump from his plane, and the other apparently died before he could climb into the rubber life boat, it seems safe to conclude that neither of them survived the collision by more than a very few seconds and, therefore, any suffering either of them may have experienced must of necessity have been but momentary.

Yesterday the members of the squadron paid tribute to the memory of Ed and Ensign Wilbur at a small, simple, but very moving Memorial service. We wish you had been with us.

We will send you Ed's personal effects as soon as possible. That was his wish. If anything further develops, we will let you know immediately.

Again allow me to extend to you the heartfelt sympathy of the entire squadron and the group in your loss. I only wish that I could do something to help you in your sorrow. Ed was a fine officer and must have been a son of whom you were proud. We all feel his loss tremendously. Please do not hesitate to call on me for any assistance at any time.

Very sincerely yours,



F.E. BAKUTIS, Lieut-Comdr., USN,
Commanding Officer.