

HEADQUARTERS
461ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) ARMY AIR FORCES
Office of the Combat Intelligence Officer

221/704

APO 520, c/o Postmaster
New York, N.Y.
24 March 1945

SUBJECT: Escape Statement

TO: Commanding General, Fifteenth Air Force, APO 520, c/o PM, NY, NY
Attention: AC of S, A-2.

THROUGH: Commanding General, 49th Bombardment Wing (H), APO 520, c/o PM,
NY, NY

1. Forms for escape statements have been filled out by and are included for forwarding as follows:

- a. Major Robert K. Baker, 0-726551
- b. 1st Lt. Jack A. Bowen, 0-722268
- c. 1st Lt. Glenn W. Burleson, 0-722467
- d. 1st Lt. Robert F. Phalen, 0-706633
- e. 1st Lt. Andrew W. Polk, Jr., 0-723429
- f. 1st Lt. Lawrence O. Woodruff, 0-705872
- g. S/Sgt. James E. Carter, 14082463
- h. S/Sgt. William J. Harvey, 34768299
- i. Sgt. Kenneth R. Navak, 39206322
- j. Sgt. John H. Angaroni, Jr., 32926417
- k. Sgt. Edward A. Leibe, 31273489
- l. Sgt. Donald S. Oakley, 12134806

2. The above listed flight leader crew led the 461st Bombardment Group formation on a combat mission against the Vienna South Station, Austria, on 21 February 1945. The B-24 airplane in which they were flying was hit hard by flak just before bombs away. Engines No. 1, 2, and 4 were all hit by flak. Of these No. 2 was the hardest hit. This engine caught on fire, lost all its oil, and had a runaway prop which could not be feathered. Much of the oil was also lost from engines No. 1 and 4.

3. Source No. 1 – Major Robert K. Baker, 0-726551

Major Baker states that the airplane was saved from a certain serious fire and probable explosion by the flight engineer, S/Sgt. William J. Harvey who shut off the gasoline to the No. 2 engine immediately after it caught on fire. During the rally after the target, the crippled airplane rolled out of the formation to the left. Major Baker asked the navigator, Lt. Bowen, for a heading to an emergency landing field. Lt. Bowen selected the strip at Pecs, Hungary (46°03' N - 18°12' E). The crippled airplane, slowly losing altitude, proceeded to Pecs at an indicated air speed of 140 miles per hour. The airplane arrived over the field at 12,000 feet altitude. Plane circled the field, let the gear down, checked it at 10,000 feet, and shot flares. Landing was made to the east. The strip at

Pecs turned out to be approximately 3,000 feet in length. It has been made by dumping cinders on a wood corduroy road.

Before circling the field at Pecs, the crew destroyed the radar equipment in the airplane. Hatchets were used to do this after the detonators for the destruction of the equipment failed to work. No flak was fired at the aircraft as it circled Pecs, but it was shot at by small arms.

The following airplanes were on the field at Pecs when Source No. 1 landed his airplane: (1) A B-24 radar airplane which had overrun the strip and crashed into a nearby house; (2) An unidentified airplane which had been strafed but a few minutes previous to the landing now being reported and which was burning furiously when the crippled airplane of this Group landed; and (3) A captured Do-217 which was used by the Russians as a mail plane.

When the plane stopped, it was met by a Russian soldier who directed the pilot where to park the plane. Once the plane was parked the Russian soldier requested Source No. 1 to again move the plane so it could be camouflaged.

The entire crew were placed in a Russian hospital at Pecs for the night where they received excellent treatment. The following day the Russian Commandant at Pecs issued travel orders for ten (10) members of the crew to go to Baja, Hungary (46°11' N - 18°57' E). The ten (10) members of the crew left in a truck for Baja at 1600 hours on 22 February 1945. The truck did not leave them at Baja, however, but took them to Csavoly, Hungary (46°12' N - 19°09' E). It was explained to the crew that they were being moved because of the fact that both Pecs and Baja were subject to daily strafing by the enemy. At Csavoly the crew members were taken to the reception center for Americans. With them the crewmembers had rations for 21 days which had been issued by the Russian Commandant at Pecs. At Csavoly the officers and men were housed in private homes of the native Hungarians. Some of the Hungarians spoke English and all were friendly.

In issuing travel orders for ten (10) members of the crew to be taken to Baja, the Russian Commandant at Pecs explained that two (2) members of the crew would have to remain at the airdrome to guard the plane. Lt. Phalen and Sgt. Navak were selected for this detail. After the other members of the crew had left, they were repeatedly subject to strafing by the enemy. They were required to drain the gasoline from the airplane to reduce the possibility of it being set on fire by strafing. They were also required to explain the mechanics of the plane to the Russians. The Russians attempted to repair the airplane during the time Lt. Phalen and Sgt. Navak were stationed at the field. A great deal of time was spent in carefully camouflaging the plane.

After fourteen (14) days at Csavoly, the ten (10) members of the crew received orders from the Russian Commandant to be returned to the Group by way of Bucharest, Odessa, and Cairo. The ten (10) officers and men were returned by truck to Baja where they were met by Lt. Phalen and Sgt. Navak. They were placed on freight cars, twenty-five men to a car, for shipment to Bucharest. In the party there were a total of seventy-one (71) repatriates. After two days of travel the train reached Timisoara, Roumania (45°46' N - 21°E) where Major Baker ordered the crewmembers to detrain and requested

the Russian authorities for better transportation. The following day they were placed on a deluxe train and taken to Bucharest where they arrived on 14 March 1945.

In Bucharest the crew reported to the American Mission. The United States officers stationed there were successful in getting the orders revoked for the crew to continue to Odessa, but a great deal of trouble was experienced in getting the crew cleared for Bari. This difficulty was partly due to the fact that the Russians were looking for a man by the name of Dionescu (?) who was believed to be making efforts to escape from Roumania by airplane. Clearance papers were finally arranged and the twelve (12) crewmembers were returned to Bari on 22 March 1945 in a C-47. Crew was processed through Fifteenth Air Force and were returned to the 461st Group on 23 March 1945.

4. No member of the crew was in enemy hands.

5. Crewmembers make the following recommendations:

a. The political situation in Roumania is very delicate. All United States combat crewmembers should be briefed to avoid discussing political questions with any Europeans.

b. Information-Identification cards and American flags for shoulder patches are very important.

c. No man is a real soldier in the eyes of the Russians without a pistol.

d. Much more clothing and Red Cross kits should be provided for the American Mission in Bucharest.

6. This crew was interrogated by the Group Combat Intelligence Officer on 23 March 1945.

LEIGH M. LOTT
Major, Air Corps
Combat Intelligence Officer