

HEADQUARTERS FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
APO 520 U.S. Army

13 October 1944
Ref: USA/SKP/123

ESCAPE STATEMENT

1. Eagan, Robert Louis, 2nd Lt., 0-812235, 758 Sq., 459 Gp.

Born - 7 Feb 1921 Enlisted - 28 Oct 1942

Home Address - 3119 Congress St., Chicago, Ill.

Peacetime Profession - Student

MIA - 15 April 1944 RTD - 14 Oct 1944 Missions - 5

1. Merwald, Bernard J., Sgt. 37480769, 764 Sq., 461 B. Gp.

Born - 23 Feb 1921 Enlisted - 26 May 1943

Home Address - 3612 Y St., Omaha, Neb.

Peacetime Profession - Student

MIA - 3 July 1944 RTD - 13 Oct 1944 Missions - 10

1. Jacobus, Edgar M., Jr., S/Sgt., 2694949, 764 Sq., 461 Gp.

Born - 23 Feb 1921 Enlisted - 25 July 1942

Home Address - 134 So. Munn Ave., East Orange, New Jersey

Peacetime Profession - Student

MIA - 3 July 1944 RTD - 13 Oct 1944 Missions - 12

1. Fersht, Robert, Sgt., 32795034, 725 Sq., 451 Gp.

Born - 15 Oct 1924 Enlisted - 6 Feb 1943

Home Address - 400 New Lots Ave., Brooklyn, New York

Peacetime Profession - Aviation Parts Inspector

MIA - 3 July 1944 RTD - 13 Oct 1944 Missions - 47 or 7 (?)

2. Sgt. Merwald bailed out on 3 July 1944 when three engines failed over the Libamire Valley (Irebinje, Yugoslavia). He was flying on a mission to Bucharest.

He was picked up at once by a Chetnik soldier who took him to his commander and thence on 4 July to the Command Headquarters at Sileca, where he joined 2nd Lt. R.L. Eagan and other American evaders.

S/Sgt. E.M. Jacobus, Jr. who was engineer on the same plane, landed safely in the same area as Sgt. Merwald and was picked up by a Chetnik peasant who handed him over to the Chetnik army. He was then taken the same day to Sileca, 3 July, where he joined 2nd Lt. Eagan and other American evaders.

Sgt. Fersht was on the same mission on 3 July 1944 and owing to mechanical failure bailed out over Yugoslavia. He landed at Uvzcca where he was hidden for a few hours then taken by Chetniks to the local command at Serpo. Then on foot to Sileca, reached 4 July 1944, where he found eleven other American evaders including Lt. Eagan.

Source, Lt. Robert L. Eagan, was flying as copilot for Lt. B. E. Cole on a mission to Bucharest, 15 April 1944, but bombed Nis as primary target was overcast. Everything was okay but soon after leaving Nis, three engines ran out of gas, (they did not actually stop, but were giving little power). At this time the plane was down to 4,000 feet and they saw they could not clear the next ridge so they bailed out over a valley.

Source landed near Silica, spraining his ankle badly. He was met by farmers and then joined the engineer and ass't. engineer and taken to a farmhouse where they were picked up by Chetnik soldiers.

3. Never in the hands of the enemy.

4. The Chetnik soldiers took them to Sileca, meeting the pilot en route who had also been picked up. They went to a Chetnik house, ate and slept in Sileca. The next morning a Lt. Fuller came in. (Pilot of some group) They then learned that the partisans had the rest of source's crew and other nine members of Lt. Fuller's crew. They went to Command Headquarters of the Chetniks about one and a half hours walk from the coast. For the next month source moved around with these Chetniks in the same general area, always keeping out of the hands of the Germans who were looking for the Chetnik radio.

About 15 May they went back to Sileca, Chetnik stronghold. Until July 4 when seven other U.S. airmen joined source, he stayed in Sileca under Chetnik hands. During that time there were several attacks by the partisans on the town, but it was never taken. About 10 June three Germans came into Sileca. Daily after that source and four other United States airmen with him had to hide in the woods all day and then come into town at dusk for the night. Other American airmen were brought in to Sileca on the few nights following 3 July, joining source and his companions making 12 USAAF men altogether. They continued keeping low in the daytime and entering the town at night.

About the 10 Aug, 3,000 Germans entered the town so source and party were taken out and hid in the hills about five kilos from Sileca, staying in a barn for five days. At 3 AM one day they were told to leave as German patrols were looking for them. Walking aimlessly until they came to an old fortress overlooking Sileca and there found an entire Chetnik Command. (Source says an Italian who had been cooking for them had tipped the Germans off and they just missed being captured.)

Source and his party were taken by three Chetniks towards Trebinje, arriving the second day. They saw the local Chetnik Commander who told them plans for their escape had been completed and a boat would take them across the Adriatic. They started for Budva on the coast the next morning. They stopped at Grub where a message was received saying only four men could be accommodated then. Source lost out in a card cut with the other four who had been with him the longest. This was 15 Aug 1944. They stayed in the general area of Trebinje for a month. On 15 Sept they returned to Goriza, (next to Trebinje). There they heard that a large group of Chetniks had come out of Serbia for an offensive against the Germans. They had Lt. Galloway with them.

The offensive began about the 19th Sept. German prisoners began coming in a day later. 800 were said to have been captured. Source was only a few miles from the lines with the Commanding Officer and the staff. By the 21st Sept all but the town of Trebinje and Dubrovnik had been taken and at that time Partisans started an attack on the Chetniks from the rear. The party then had to move each night to avoid being caught between two fires.

On 26th Sept, while at the town of Zgonjevo, they were heavily shelled morning and afternoon by Germans from both Trebinje and Dubrovnik with 75 mm and 105 mm guns. This lasted five days. They moved out about 1 Oct, marching all night and reached a small village. On 3 Oct, Chetniks moved up thru Popelopolje valley toward Trebinje, leaving only a holding force against the Germans. They took the town of Poljice on the way, a Partisan town, and fought their way to Trebinje taking 24 hours to do the march. After crossing the river of Poljice, four USAAF left the group (village of Dracevo).

The column reached Trebinje 4 Oct. It moved north next night but as some of the party did not have any shoes, they stayed behind waiting for the Chetniks to be gone. It had been raining very hard all the time and all the airmen had only shirt and pants on and had had but little food. The Chetnik Commanding Officer said it was all right to stay behind and that under the circumstances the Partisans could do more for them. One Partisan did come on the second night and took the five men to a Partisan camp in the hills.

They stayed there one day and then went to Sileca. From Sileca to Nikeic arriving at the latter place 10 Oct after a two day march thru rain. There they met the American Mission. They were clothed there and waited until 12 Oct when they were evacuated. On 11th Oct, seven other USAAF men arrived and all went out together to Bari on Russian C-47s.

A. A. BATES
1st Lt., Air Corps

7 Incls.
4 Ltr. 383.6
5 Appendix B
6 Appendix D
7 Appendix F