

15 August 1944

ESCAPE STATEMENT

1. Sanders, Robert M., 1st Lt., 0-753079, 766th Sq., 461st Bomb Group

Born - 26 August 1918

Enlisted - Topalen, Kansas

Home Address - 1809 Randolph Street, Topalen, Kansas

Peacetime Profession - Grocer

MIA - 12 July 1944

RTD - 15 August 1944

Missions - 26

2. Never in enemy hands.

3. 12 July 1944 took off from Torretta on mission to Nimes, France. About 30 to 40 miles in from coast of France enroute to target we were attacked by ME-109s from 1130 level. Hit by 20 mm in flight deck. Fires started on flight deck and in bomb bays. Heard alarm bell and order to bail out over interphone. Bailed out through nose wheel door. Bail out was at 17,000 feet. Delay jump pulled rip cord at 9 - 10,000 feet. Airplane exploded about 15 seconds after source bailed out. Landed about six miles southeast of Seillan, France.

4. Hit in clearing on side of mountain about 200 yards from highway. German patrol on highway started toward source who was getting out of parachute harness and "Mae West". Ran up mountain and concealed self in thicket about 30 yards away. Germans took chute and harness and Mae West. Continued over mountain and encountered two Frenchmen walking along trail. They recognized source as an airman and took him to small stream nearby and concealed him in a thicket there. They advised him to remain there and left returned with bread, ham, some kind of tea, wine and a very strong white whiskey. Also brought civilian clothing and Colt .38 cal. Special revolver.

5. Source remained there from 1500 to 2130 that same night. Helpers returned at 2130 and took source further up mountain to a thicket where he slept on two parachutes supplied by helpers. Remained until 0900 next morning where helpers returned again with more food. Helpers then took source over to another mountain nearby where he joined S/Sgt James W. Kelley and S/Sgt Robert J. Weisfeld, members of his crew.

6. Helpers took the three men to a clearing on top of this mountain where they remained for 9 days during which time the helpers supplied them with food, water and wine.

7. On the ninth day helpers took them to a deserted farmhouse approximately one-half mile south of Seillon. Remained there about 15 days - until 5th of August - helpers still supplying food and water.

8. On 5 August helpers arranged for transportation in civilian wood-burning vehicle and took sources approximately 100 kilometers N. of Seillon to another camp in mountains - about 20 kilometers east of Apt where they remained until 0300 on the morning of the 11th of August. Taken 15 kilometers from the camp to a landing strip in a clearing in the mountains. From this point they were flown in a DC-3 (British crew) back to Italy (town near Florence). Brought by truck, supplied by Britain, down to Piombino. Partial interrogation by Captain Kolisch, G-2, 5th Army. Captain Kolisch arranged for GI truck to take source to home. Brought to Bari by C-53, MATS.

T. A. Fall
1st Lt., Air Corps,
Interrogator

3 Incls:

- 1 - Ltr. 383.6
- 2 - Appendix B
- 3 - Appendix C

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APPENDIX B

12 July 1944: Roland Bolf, 20 years old youth, and another man by the name of Louis, cared for the three evaders until the 5th of August together with mother and father. This is one of the leading families in this sector and are very active in underground movement. Food, clothing, cigarettes, wine, all possible aids also contacted Maqui. Supplied arms and ammunition.

5 August 1944: Pierre Michele, man who operated camp in mountains where evaders are brought for evacuation. Supplied food, blankets, tent, cigarettes, etc. Made arrangements for evacuation.

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APPENDIX C

1. There was a German garrison of approximately 200 men, two to three kilometers from evacuation landing strip. Direction unknown.

2. On source's own crew known deceased: S/Sgt Leonard S. Johnson, waist gunner, badly injured by fire from enemy a/d. He remained in plane. 2nd Lt. W. J. Graham, navigator, was riding on flight deck and burned, was unable to jump.

3. French reported that they buried 3 men from front section of airplane, one was identified as Graham and other two are believed by source to be the pilot, 1st. Lt. Richard S. Fawcett, and co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Frank I. Densted. It is also believed by source that the engineer, T/Sgt Walter Gladkowski, is also dead in as much as he was also riding on the flight deck. The remaining two crew members' fate is unknown.

4. Source had food kit and purse with exception of money kits are no use according to source. Maps are not in enough detail, should show smaller roads. Helper's refused to accept money. Source had not been briefed on any SLA's but basic information from briefings had been very good. Source suggests that additional first aid equipment be supplied.

5. Source's story is straightforward and consistent in detail.