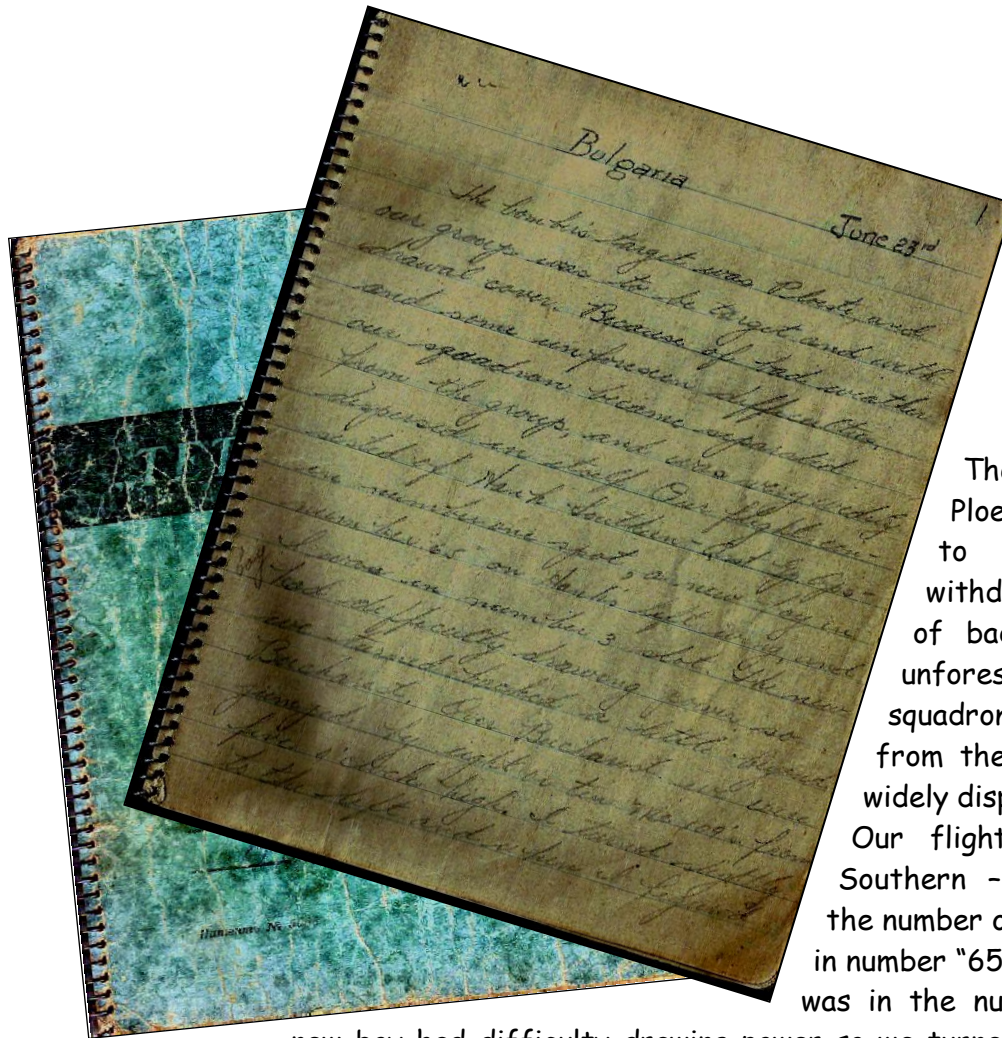


Lt. David G Hanson's – Shumen Diary

(David Hanson collection)



BULGARIA

June 23rd

The bombing target was Ploesti and our group was to be target and withdrawal cover. Because of bad weather and some unforeseen difficulties, our squadron became separated from the group that was very widely dispersed in itself.

Our flight consisted of Hank Southern -Asst. Group Op's -in the number one spot, and a new boy in number "65" on Hank's left wing, I was in the number three slot. The

new boy had difficulty drawing power so we turned back a little beyond Bucharest when we were jumped by eight or ten Me 109's¹ from five o'clock high. I turned slightly to the left and when I figured the new fellow had time to clear me and get on back to Hank. I broke sharply into the Me's which had almost closed to firing range. I exchanged a few burst with two of the Me 109's and continued thru their formation. I cleared my tail and looked around for Hank and the new fellow who should have had time to break clear. I saw one of them a thousand feet down pulling for home. Then at the three o'clock level I saw three of the Me's on one of the fellow's tail in a half

¹ Messerschmitt BF 109; German fighter plane often called the Me 109

barrel to the left. I broke to the right and shot out the tail of the first Me, who was firing long bursts at the P-51, which turned out to be the new boy in number "65". I gave the Me a long burst closing from 45 degrees to about -5 degrees off. I saw numerous strikes on the fuselage and wing root. Pieces flew off of the whole canopy or part of it. The jerry did a half snap and continued on out of my right on his side.

I had lost track of "65" by now and continued in a climbing spiral to the left. They were coming at me from all angles and I was able to get several short bursts at a few of them when they flew by in front of me. On one I got in a few hits which evidently tore off his right wing tip. I finally cleared that group at 23,000' but without knowing it I had climbed up to what was evidently the group's top cover. This bunch wasn't as aggressive as the first and I was able to climb up thru them after exchanging a few bursts. In this group I got several hits and the wing root of one of them. After clearing them I squared away on a course for home and climbed to 31,000 feet.

The plane looked to be in pretty good shape with a few small holes in the wings, and one big hole in the left wing about six feet from the fuselage. Everything seemed okay though, so I started to breathe easier. But the engine began to run rough and my oil readings and coolant began indicating abnormally. I tried the remedies for icing and oil congealing but it was no go. It began to lose power and altitude till I decided I'd have to bail out. I tried to nurse it along as long as I could, but when I got down to around two thousand feet I gave up and pulled the canopy release which didn't work. So I opened it the normal way and bailed out at about five hundred feet.

I landed in a small clearing on the side of a steep wooded hill. I hid my chute in the brush and ran into the woods. I figured I was in Yugoslavia by the time (1100) so I kept on the lookout for peasants. After a half-hour of walking I came upon some farmers who were very friendly and took me to their village. I thought I was all set, but was disappointed when one of them brought an officer who turned out to be Bulgarian. They marched me to another larger house about ten miles away when I was eventually picked up by a car and driven to Sofia, where I was given a thorough interrogation.

I stayed there for three days in the prison - with political prisoners and several U.S. airmen. We Americans were shipped to the PW camp in Shuman.² There were ninety-six other Americans (except for a few British and Balkanizes). Life in the camp is horrible -

² David G. Hanson he becomes POW #126 (counting all nationalities) admitted to the Shumen Camp and is brought to Camp #1 on 6/27/44.

very few books, lousy cigarettes, everything is inadequate. The Bulgars³ are certainly not trying to cement a friendship with the U.S.

At present there are eighteen of us new fellows in a hut about fifteen feet by twenty feet. Our beds consist of overlarge burlap bags filled with straw which are on the floor. Each morning were given a loaf of brown bread apiece which is for the three meals. At breakfast we usually have "tea" -sometimes "marmalade" to put on the bread. Dinner and supper is usually rice or bean soup. Once in awhile we have German field rations -known as "grass", very unappetizing stuff. For in-between snacks at times we can buy cheese (220 per kilo) marmalade (270 per kilo) or honey (325 per kilo) that way we try to keep full as long as the money lasts.⁴

The most popular recreation here is bathing -we are all beginning to look like Indians. Other than that we can sleep, play with the homemade cards⁵ or read one of the ragged books -if you can find one. We have PT each afternoon which fills in part of day.

It's a humiliating sight to see the clothes worn here. We have only what we landed with and the ones who have been here for more than five or six months are terribly ragged. A lot of them have only old Bulgarian uniforms to wear. We're supposed to be provided with clothes but it's another case where Bulgaria has violated the Geneva Convention. It's possible to go through the list of atrocities and point to where they have failed to comply with everyone.

There are several fellows here who should definitely be repatriated. Legs⁶ or feet missing⁷ parts of legs shot away, one with an arm which is slowly dying⁸. The medical attention here is terribly poor. The doctors evidently don't consider us worth bothering. When Lt. Judd⁹ bailed out of his P-38 he hit his head on the elevators and split his scalp open. One of the enlisted here; Drake¹⁰ - took care of him and it finally healed shut but left a wicked looking scar.

³ "Bulgars" Citizens of Bulgaria (slang)

⁴ A Bulgarian peddler and his cart was allowed into the camp and would sell eggs, razor blades, cheese and such. The men would purchase this with the POW pay owed them and paid to them by the Red Cross.

⁵ Cards were made out of the packages of Bulgarian cigarettes

⁶ Sergeants' Lloyd Brisbi /Ned Howard shot down on 8/1/43 each lost a leg

⁷ S/Sgt. James O'Neal shot down on 4/4/44 and lost a portion of his heel

⁸ 2Lt. Dan Wylie - shrapnel wounds -shot down on 6/11/44

⁹ Lt. Thomas Judd shot down on 1/24/44

¹⁰ Sgt. Robert Drake -acted as camp medic - shot down 1/24/44

All in all, this is a terrible example of a PW camp. Surprisingly enough, the moral of the fellows is very good. The reason for this is that it's generally believed that the Bulgaria will give in late this summer or in the fall. I certainly pray that we are released by then. There is the possibility that we will have to make our own way to Turkey, in which case I'm going to start using my shoes sparingly. One thing is sure -our government is going to hear how we've been mistreated and neglected.¹¹ These are a very treacherous people.

Wednesday July 5th

Yesterday was routine except for the air raid alarm we had. Evidently the 15th hit Bucharest or Ploesti. I hope they "KAPUT" the damn place.

Jack Muirhead¹² and I have been talking of places we've been to dinners that we'd like to have, and food in general. We've decided to get together when we're back at home and have some dinners together.

We've been also listing miscellaneous items we want:

¹¹ Lt. David G. Hanson was one of the fourteen POWs that were part of the Hall Mission - that returned to Bulgaria in response to the investigation of atrocities conducted by General Hall

¹² 2nd Lt. John (Jack) G. Muirhead – pilot- shot down 6/23/1944

Steak
Potatoes
Strawberry shortcake
Oyster cocktail
Chocolate éclairs
Macaroon cookies
Beer
Hotcakes
Peaches & cream
Milk shakes
Chicken
Waffles
Roast beef
Baked ham
Cold cereal & chilled fruit
Graham cracker milk
Boston brown bread
Toasted marshmallows
Raisin bread (cinnamon toast)
Fried bananas
Corn fritters & country sausage –breakfast
Crumb cake
Cream puffs

Graham cracker pie
Lemmon meringue pie
Hamburgers
Hot dogs
Pies
Chocolate candy
Banana split
Marmalade jam
Peanut butter cookies & cake
Butterscotch pastry
Bran muffins
Toasted cheese dreams
Apple strudel
Apple pancakes
Brownies & Coconut cake
Cup cakes
Pumpkin pie
Cup cakes
Ice box cookies
Fried potato cakes
Nut cake
Gingerbread cookies

Dinner!

Jack
Dry martini
Oysters on half-shell
Consume, rolls and butter
Steak with mushrooms
Corn on cob
French fries
Peas
Buttered asparagus
Garden salad
Apple pie alamode
Coffee

Me
Dry martini
Shrimp cocktail
Consume, rolls and butter
Steak
Corn-on-cob
Hashed brown
Buttered asparagus
Tomato salad
Chocolate cake alamode
Coffee

Breakfasts

1st choice

Jack

Tomato juice
Corn flakes, peaches & cream
Bacon and eggs
Toast and jam
Coffee

Me

Grapefruit juice
Corn flakes, bananas and cream
Toast and preserves
Coffee, milk, sweet buns

2nd choice

Pineapple juice
Strawberries and cream
Fried smelt
Hashed browns
Johnny cakes
Coffee

Orange juice
Blackberries and cream
Hotcakes and hashed browns
Molasses bean
Boston brown bread
Coffee, milk

3rd choice

Orange juice
Cereal, blueberries & milk
Hotcakes & pineapple fried ham
Hot rolls
Coffee

Pineapple juice
Cereal, strawberries & cream
Waffles
Chopped eggs
Sweet buns, coffee, milk

Thursday July 6th

Gads, I'm hungry! Even that bean soup will taste good.¹³ I heard another "interesting" story this morning. Three "*Per Willie*"¹⁴ of Gore's crew were making their way from the scene of the plane crash, when they were fired upon by some Bulgars. Lt. Graham was immediately killed¹⁵, and one of the remaining two was hit by two bullets.¹⁶ The Bulgars arrived in due time, and after stripping everything off Lt. Graham's body -dug a crude

¹³ The daily diet for the POWs at Shumen was a total of 600 calories. They were rationed water at one quart per person per day (it was their call to drink it or use it for hygiene).

¹⁴ T/Sgt. Willie R. Owen, Jr. - shot down 6/11/44

¹⁵ November 24, 1943 -near the village of Strumitsa, Macedonia (a group of local armed peasants killed Lt. Charles Graham, Jr.)

¹⁶ T/Sgt. Thomas De Guiseppe was shot in the right arm and left heel

grave and buried the naked corpse. The Lord only knows how many Allied flyers have been killed and similarly treated -not a few, I'll wager.

Friday July 7th

It's a pretty poor day in this lousy country -looks as though we'll have some rain. A few moments ago they dumped Dan Wylie in a cart and took him down to the hospital. He looks very bad -I hope he doesn't lose his arm. He was shot up June 11th and has had only first aid treatment for his shoulder and face.¹⁷ Right now we're on one of our favorite topics - when we'll get out of Bulgaria. I'm with the optimistic side and think it will be this fall or sooner. The peasants say next summer -come on Russia.

Saturday July 8th

Last night we heard a hell of a good rumor. As it goes, Bulgaria "told" Berlin to withdraw all German troops from Bulgaria by July 10th. What a break if that were only true. I don't believe it, but like to think and talk about it. These too, there is a report that the Russians have started their long awaited drive in the south. I hope so.

Sunday July 9th

We expected to move to our new camp today but no such luck. I really don't know if it's any better, but there's that old saying about the grass being greener on the other side of the fence. At any rate, it's larger than this place. We understand there are a hundred or so fellows at the garrison¹⁸ waiting to move in also. No news today -hope the war is going okay. Every night I lay awake and hour or two thinking about my last fight.

I keep wondering if I did anything wrong.¹⁹ I hope that new boy got home okay -it would be hell to go down on your first mission. I'm going to claim a probable and two damaged on the last mission. Too bad that first bastard didn't blow up so I could have a victory. But I'll let that wait until I'm interrogated.

¹⁷ 2nd Lt. Dan Wylie-continued to carry those fragments of shrapnel in his arm and wrist the rest of his life

¹⁸ The garrison was located in the town of Shumen and was a temporary holding area for the men waiting to be admitted to the camp.

¹⁹ * John (Jack) Muirhead addressed this feeling while writing his book and put it this way. "Within our inner thoughts, each of us felt that in some way we had all screwed up." He also mentions a conversation he had with a crew member of "The Witch" who had seen everyone come and go. He told Muirhead to look about him; within the fences, there were 328 others who had in some way "screwed up."

Tuesday July 11th

Luck today -I bought a kilo of apricots and one kilo of apples. The apricots are tasty but the apples are no good. Since the Bulgars stole all my money²⁰, I 'm going to sell my GI watch for 3500 leva. I hope the U.S. taxpayers will forgive me, but I'm lucky it wasn't confiscated before this.

We've had a couple of hot rumors today. One is that the jerries are pulling out of Bulgaria. The second is that Bulgaria is withdrawing her troops from Yugoslavia and Macedonia. If it's true, it's a sure sign they are preparing to get out of the war.

Wednesday July 12th

No news again today -it's awfully dull without it. Hope we have some good hot rumors tomorrow. Jack and I were talking today and I decided to buy a car when I get home. That is if I can get a fairly good one around \$500. Preferably a Buick '37 or '38.

Friday July 14th

Yesterday we moved to our new camp²¹ -it's much better than the old place. Here we have double -decker bunks "sheets" and "pillows". We collected some rumors from the new boys, but nothing sensational. My MIA report should have reached home by now.

I hope Mother doesn't worry too much. I hope too, it won't be too long before the PW report reaches here.

Wednesday July 19th

Still nothing of interest -a couple of rumors have been confirmed but events are moving too slowly to bring our release closer in our eyes.

²⁰ It was a very common practice that when the men were being escorted to Shumen that many of their belongings were confiscated by a Bulgarian guard named Benyu Chernev. He was picked up after the liberation for these crimes and held for the Hall mission tribunal.

²¹ Those that could walk were marched for four hours to the new camp located on "Ilchov" hill

Saturday July 22nd

Still nothing new - I have decided to list a few postwar possibilities'. I don't like the idea of going back to my old job.

- A. Look into establishment of state and federal airfields. Perhaps I could wangle a job as operations officer, seeing as I have some experience in that here.
- B. Join some charter service. They will be in demand after the war.
- C. Investigate Foreign Service with some large company such as oil or rubber. Maybe Met Life would have something.
- D. Investigate government paid tuition for post war education. Take a course with respect to future job. Ask Met for one year release while studying insurance.

Sunday July 23rd

Rumor -Russians will take Varna on the 24th and on the 25th Bulgaria will capitulate.

July 24th to July 31st

Above rumors proved false -Nothing else of interest.

Tuesday August 1st

A really hot one today -on the 5th Bulgaria will demobilize 75% of their army. That one sizzles.

Wednesday August 2nd

Paid today 6300 leva.²² Plenty of money for "PX" supplies. Heard good rumors too—Looks very possible that we'll get out this month. Bulgaria should be at peace by the 15th and we should be on our way home by the end of the month.

P.P. (Postwar Possibility) -Well have to inquire around Dad's old friends for an opening in plastics field.

²² Captured officers were paid 6300 leva a month - the equivalent of \$50 to \$65 USD (same amount as a Bulgarian soldier was paid per month) per terms of the Geneva Convention

Monday August 7th

This brings my new "diary" up to date. There are a few items which I will enter here, but should have been inserted sooner. About a week and a half ago the Bulgars' gave the Mexican²³ a working over. That is another point these vicious people will have to answer for.²⁴ We were talking (last night) of mistreatment in this wretched country and I was brought to mind of the threats of firing squads and beatings up I was to receive because of refusing to answer questions at the interrogation at Sofia. News this evening is very encouraging Russians close to Cracow²⁵, Yanks driving the Beast, and Turkey breaking off relations with Germany yet continuing on "friendly" relations with the Balkans. The end looks very near -this month is very possible.

Tuesday August 8th

Allied planes are evidently somewhere over the Balkans for we were all headed inside at 1630. As can be imagined, there are numerous card games and a few groups of fellows discussing various subjects. Very monotonous -news today says the Yanks are on the move in France. That's good to hear.

Wednesday August 9th

Rain -just finished playing cards. How I wish I had some educational books to read. This time is a 100% waste.

I hope Mother realizes that I'm probably a prisoner after getting that MIA report. It worries me to think she might have the wrong idea of it. I know Mother is okay -she has confidence in that I'll be back.

Thursday August 10th

The news today was good. Last night the Partisans raided a town 30 miles from here - burned the town hall, stole all the money and food they could. One regiment of infantry was sent from here to try to capture them. Turkey is mobilizing and Bulgaria is sending

23 S/Sgt John V. Orona -shot down 4/6/1944

24 Lt. David Hanson was one of 14 former POWs that did return after being liberated from this camp along with Lt's. JUDD and MUIRHEAD as part of the HALL MISSION

25 Also spelled Krakow, Poland

"love notes" to the Turks. Tch! Tch! How I'd love to see these Turk soldiers get a taste of war! If only Turkey would march across the border.²⁶

Sunday August 13th

No rumors yet, I hope this period is "the lull before the storm". The past week or more has shown a decided scarcity of hot tips, living the way we do with such a limited amount of water has caused an outbreak of body lice, etc. We had to shave all the hair from our crotches and armpits.²⁷

I've been fairly lucky though, and haven't been bothered too much by the "mechanized freckles" and such. The main cause is the fact that we haven't enough water to wash our clothes frequently enough.²⁸

Yesterday I talked for an hour or more to Sgt. Murphy²⁹ and was surprised to discover he went to Dukane³⁰. He's an interesting speaker and has a pretty sound idea on how to get ahead. Sell yourself first and then learn the fundamentals of the business plus everything about your particular job. His idea is to get in the management end of a business and work up there.

²⁶ Turkey remained neutral during most of World War II, but entered the war on the side of the Allies on February 23, 1945 as a ceremonial gesture.

²⁷ S/Sgt. Robert H. Johnson POW #190 arrived on 7-16-1944 and on his arrival recalls the following in his book *Gidi Gidi Boom Boom* as he approached the front gate of the camp:

"Everyone was bareheaded with a sun tan. But the big surprise was that many of them had nothing on! Without feeling embarrassment or even the hint of being different, those who peered at us through the fence had bodies with attachments that made them look like overgrown young boys, yet here they were, grown up, without a pubic hair showing. Shaven from head to toe, their skinny and sun tanned bodies failed to conceal or hide their blemishes; there was ample evidence of sores and scratches, about their ankles and waists. Without a word between us, we understood the implication of those scabs, having just encountered the Mongolians in Sofia—this place was crawling with lice. At night, those unrelenting blood suckers, from their hideout in the straw bedding and pillows, attacked the POWs while they slept, biting their ankles, arms and neck. But thank God for the summer months, the POWs could escape their infectious and incessant bites during the day, by tossing their clothes on the fence for sunning, while they at the same time enjoyed a sun bath in the nude. Or one could spend a leisurely morning perusing the shirt and pants, looking for hidden little eggs about the stitching or hems."

²⁸ The daily ration of water was one quart per person. They could drink it or wash themselves or their clothing. The choice was theirs.

²⁹ T/Sgt. Melvin G. Murphy—radio operator—shot down 6/23/1944

³⁰ Dukane University, Pittsburgh, PA

When I'm on leave, I'll have to see the fellows in the office again and make the rounds with them. Also I'd like to shop around by myself in NYC on one or two days, just to re-acquaint myself with the big city.

-Just got back from church services. We meet in the mess hall and sing hymns which we all know -one fellow leads in scripture reading and prayers. We also have a choir. -B.T.O.'s Well, we did get a rumor; "Bulgaria is to have a parliament meeting on the 15th." Why I don't know.

Monday August 14th

Did very little so far today at 11:15 AM Bob Newsom³¹ gave me some tips on a photograph which I have listed in the rear of the book. Then I gave him some suggestions as to where to go and what to see in NYC. It's surprising how much I forgotten about the big city. The news was fairly good today, for all we know, it might be better than we realize. Ankara³² issued a statement to Bulgaria soft soaping them to a disgusting degree calling Bulgaria the most "important and courageous" country in the Balkans and expressing the desire to establish a "brotherhood" with her. Turkey does seem to be giving this country an easy chance for a graceful exit from the war. Played cards and had my usual two or three tomato sandwiches in the PM.

Tuesday August 15th

Nothing of tremendous importance in the newscast today. No news at all about the Turkish situation. We should have some good news very soon in my opinion. Bob Harper³³ and Wood³⁴ are busy planning the coming stage production. It will do to fill in some time for us until it's produced. We have another deck of cards almost finished -we make them from the tops of the cigarette packages. I bought a basket from one of the guards yesterday - it cost me 200 leva, which is about equivalent to \$2.50 (according to Bulgars rate of exchange). It's a crude affair, but it gives me something to keep my odds and ends in. Today I finished reading the New Testament. Started it during the first part of July and have been reading five or ten chapters each day. I'm going to start reading it again to see if I can find something to "inspire" me. I realize I'm lucky to get off without losing my life but I'm not thankful enough. It seems that it just wasn't my time to make that last flight. Perhaps someday I'll understand. I've been doing a lot of thinking pertaining to Millie and

³¹ 2nd Lt. Robert L. Newsom-navigator- shot down 6/23/1944

³² Ankara -the capital of Turkey and the country's second largest city.

³³ 1st Lt. Robert C. Harper -co-pilot- shot down 7/3/1944

³⁴ 1st Lt. William H. Wood, Jr. -co-pilot - shot down 8/8/1944

marriage. I'm mighty reluctant about getting married, but I imagine it's the bachelors' natural and inevitable feelings. I'll know when I get home and see her again. Our supper (potato soup) is over and it's about time for evening count, then the regular bull session till nine, and then to bed. This is a might dull life—ok for good old "Jersey".

Wednesday Aug 16th

Before I forget, I'd better write down the rumor which came in last night. As it goes, our present commandant made a prediction that we'd leave before his present tour ends on Sept. 15th, this is unusual for he is strictly an SOB.

It's now 0620 and breakfast should be ready in half an hour. I understand we're going to have "marmalade" with our "tea" this morning. Good deal! We did have marmalade.—Just finished a discussion of ribbons and medals with the fellows—I'm pissed off again. Whenever we talk about it, I get disgusted as all hell. Ribbons have become cheap—there's no value to them anymore. The Eighth Air Force did this by handing out ribbons to everyone. You can always tell a flying officer of the 8th by the chest full of DFC's, DSC's, PH's, etc.³⁵ what a publicity conscious outfit! —Four-thirty already... time for another tomato and cucumber sandwich. But before I do, there are a couple of new rumors. First - the Americans and French have landed in southern France. Second- the Russians are 140K from Bucharest.³⁶ I haven't much faith in the second one but it is a good rumor. Now for that sandwich -this is my fifth or sixth one today, and they sure help to keep one's stomach full. We buy them from a Bulgarian farmer for 45 leva per kilo (2.2 pounds). Cucumbers are 15 a piece. We can also get eggs -six for fifty leva - High, but worth it.

Thursday Aug. 17th

0830 Breakfast (tea) and morning count are over, and thus begins another day. Just before we all hit the hay (literally) last night we heard the news. Allies have landed in southern France and immense battles are going on in western France. If my guess is right the Russians will start another big drive within two to three days. Now is the time for Bulgaria to get out of the war, but why aren't they doing it? I can't figure this country out.

Sunday Aug. 20th

Feeling good again. Thursday night started what I thought was a case of malaria, but turned out to be diarrhea. Felt fair yesterday but no energy to even write in the diary.

³⁵ Distinguished Flying Cross / Distinguished Service Cross /Purple Heart

³⁶ Bucharest – capital city of Romania

Dan Wylie came back Friday and brought good news with him. There is a new Premier and there is a good chance of a pact between Bulgaria and the U.S. and Great Britain. The political prisoners are being released, also. Also on Friday -we got a new "member" to our camp. He's a "51" pilot from the same squadron as myself³⁷. What a break! He says they already know that I'm a PW. He came into the squadron the day after I went down and said all my buddies got their "firsts"³⁸ a couple of days after he joined the outfit. It looks as though I'm a first looey³⁹ after all. In a little while 50 or 60 of us are going to Shumen to take a "Turkish Bath"!!! As every day goes by, we're treated better. Evidently these stupid Bulgarians realize Germany is licked and they want us to have no complaints when we're released. I for one am not going to let them get away with anything. I'm going to bitch my head off. Half an hour or so ago, I had a fried egg on a piece of toast. The first fried egg I've had since I went down. Needless to say, it was delicious. Will have to have another one this afternoon. Eggs cost us \$1.25 per dozen (100 leva). Well worth it—

1600 hrs -Just got back from town -the bath was wonderful. Had a bottle of pop, bottle of beer and three "ice cream cones". The three together made up about one half the size of one of our ordinary five-cent cones. But it did taste good. The walk up the hill was a killer and when we arrived here we found we had twenty new prisoners. Will they never stop coming? It's way over crowded now -three men to two beds. Incidentally, I weighed myself and found I weigh about 148 lbs. It would seem that I have lost 12 pounds or so somewhere. When I get home and start catching up on my food menus, I'll get it back in no time at all. What with Lil and Mother stuffing me with dinners, and Millie with graham cracker pies, cookies etc I'll blow up like a balloon.

Monday Aug 21st

Spent a very enjoyable morning reading a novel of London's social world, Interesting. Thomsen⁴⁰ brought in some reports which he claimed to have been in the newspapers. As he told it, Paris is encircled and fighting in the suburbs. Warsaw is encircled and the Russians are nearing Cracow. In southern France the beachhead has expanded to one thousand square miles. All this is wonderful, but the bet which cheers us most is that the Russians have opened an offensive in Romania and the Germans are rushing troop and

³⁷ 325th fighter group / 318th fighter squadron

³⁸ Promoted to First Lieutenants'

³⁹ Looey ' slang for Lieutenant

⁴⁰ 2Lt. Herman J Thomsen POW #163, shot down 6-23-44 (co-Pilot)

material there. This is the umpteenth time we've had the news that they've begun their "southern drive", and I certainly hope that this time it is correct.

When we have our next news casts we will know. Had a lovely engagement with Lt. Wood this morning concerning the maneuverability of the "38" and the "51". -Just heard the news cast and most of the above is true plus a super dooper bitch! In a broadcast from Sofia to the world, it was said that the government realized 75% of the people want peace and that the government has removed all barriers to a peace. The German comment to this was that Bulgaria position was the same as that of Turkey before she switched over to the Allies and that whatever Bulgaria did would concern Bulgaria alone and would not affect the war in this part of Europe at all. From the signs, this country will be at peace within a very short time... With all this news, home seems very close to me now. To be among the folks my friends once more will be more wonderful then I can say. Just to spend an evening by the radio -reading a magazine or talking. That will be heaven. Bob Winn⁴¹ says that overseas leave is now thirty days an increase of nine days over what they were giving when I was in the squadron. Now, if we get any extra time for being PW -there will be a wonderful leave. And if my "first"⁴² goes through, everything will be perfect.

Tuesday Aug 22nd

Spent the morning playing cards -it's now about half an hour till dinner. There have been no new rumors, but yesterday's news is enough for a day or so. Already the days are beginning to drag -for our release is so near. I hope I'm right in predicting our release this month. More and more, I'm thinking of home and the people at home. It will be so good to get back. Every night I dream of being in the States again -last night I was in a bakery, shopping with Mother. I can't understand this terrible craving I have for sweets and pastries...

1430 hours—no news as yet. We have a paper, but it is still in the process of being translated.⁴³ Perhaps later today we will have a newscast. Jack, Andy, Murph⁴⁴ and Bob Harper are playing bridge and the others in our "bay" are sacking up or writing in their note books. Lt. Leonard Woods is above me -probably drawing plans for another cottage. He was going to school when he joined, and planned on becoming an architectural engineer.

⁴¹ 2nd Lt. Bobbie L. Winn – P-51 pilot shot down 7/3/1944

⁴² Promotion to first Lieutenant from second

⁴³ The Serbians POWs in the camp could read Bulgarian

⁴⁴ 2nd Lt. Robert M. Murphy, Jr. POW #114 shot down 6-11

As for me, I was reading "The Prisoner of Chillon"⁴⁵ and "Atlanta's Race"⁴⁶ when I started dreaming about home. This time it was about the folks in Valley Stream. What they're doing and how they are.

I wonder if Fred knows of any openings in Texas which might be good for my future. In that respect, Uncle John should be able to help. Don't forget to ask!!

P.P. -See if Uncle John and Fred can aid me in getting a good job with Texaco.

P.P. -Perhaps Bob Bergstresser can (by influence) get me a better situation with Metropolitan.

P.P. -Perhaps Mr. Reid can, or knows persons who can assist me in getting placed favorably somewhere...

The above prospects sound mighty small of me perhaps, but since I've been knocking around (as it were) for myself for the past five or six years, I know that with my limited education I can't expect to get anything but a mediocre job. I've boiled down a fellow's chances to get a good position with a future to three ways: (1.) Enter in a new or young field and go up as it expands. (2.) Take a position which is undesirable to most men (i.e.) foreign service with a large company. (3.) Get a job through outside influences and then dig in and learn it and the entire business inside and out. This way you have the responsible ones knowing and watching you all the time and when you excel at the job you get promotions and raises. In a company where no one is "looking after you", your efforts go unrewarded, unless by accident you are put in the limelight and one of the higher ups notices you. So it can be seen, it goes back to my original theory -you must be known by someone who can help. Lord knows, I'm not lazy and I'm intelligent enough to hold any job within my scope -I just realized that with influence to help you the sky is the limit.

Wednesday Aug. 23

Not a damn thing doing today. It rained for a while this morning and drove everyone inside. I played some bridge -now I know the fundamentals of the game, but that's about all. In time I suppose I'll learn the diamond bids and proper responses. This morning I became particularly dissatisfied with my position here. Not learning a single thing -how I wish we had a few books on business or math. I suppose it's because I'm so impatient to

⁴⁵ "The Prisoner of Chillon" a 392-line narrative poem by Lord Byron written in 1816

⁴⁶ A Greek myth written by Alexander Koshkin

get home. When I do get home, I mustn't neglect to start lining up chances for a better job. Now is the time to start, there is no time to waste -.

1630 -Just finished eating two fried eggs on toast and one tomato sandwich. Had a bit of news earlier today which is pretty good -the major⁴⁷ went to town and was allowed to go into a restaurant where he had the opportunity to speak to some Jews there. They told him that the Allies have occupied half of France and that the Russians have (once more) started their push in Romania. I used to be sure that Bulgaria would drop out of the war at least two months before Germany was licked, but I'm not so sure now. At the rate they're going in France, Germany will collapse before this -!?!* I wish this country would quit their damnable hemming and hawing. I'd say it means the difference in getting home inside of eight weeks, and waiting for room on a crowded transport for several months.

I can feel a pessimistic mood coming over me which will last till we get a newspaper or some new rumors ---- When the war is over, I hope my luck changes. It seems that I've been under an unlucky star ever since I started working. Oh, I've done well enough in the Met, but nothing like I'd want. The best and most recent example of my "good fortune" was my last flight. There I was -assistant operations officer of the squadron, heading elements in combat and due to start leading flights. My first was coming thru, and Phil Crookham was due to leave in a month or so leaving me operations officer which would have synched a captaincy for me in two or three months and perhaps I'd have gotten command of the squadron. That's what I had planned anyway. So there I am, working with big plans to the future and what happens?? I go thru a fight against 16 to 1 odds, slip away and then have to bail out because of a faulty engine. There's my "lucky star" working for me. All my ambitions gone to hell and here I am wasting away the months. But here I've acquired the determination to "get ahead" when I start work again -whatever that work may be. And, damn it, nothing -nothing is going to stop me. I'm going to marry and raise a family in a comfortable home and have the means of sending my children to college when they become of age. As I look back now I was too content with myself in the Met before the war. I was doing my best at the job, but that was all. I should have talked to Bob B. or Mr. Hoffman and asked for advice on how to get ahead of the other fellows. I'll never let myself slip into that again.

Thursday Aug. 24th

Another day in Bulgaria and another day wasted. We have a newspaper here but it is still being translated. Someone in the cabinet made a speech and it's evidently a long one for they've been translating it for an hour or two. I hope there's something in it which will give us new hopes. I'll give the jest of it when we've had the newscast. Had two fried eggs

⁴⁷ smith

this morning -very delicious. This morning I bought a chrome watch band from Captain "Dinko"⁴⁸ for six hundred leva. It's a fine looking band and its well worth the price.

Jack , Tommie and I are preparing a rare delicacy for Bulgaria. The two of them bought a can of turkey and I'm going to donate some eggs and "elbow grease" and we're going to give a crack at turkey croquettes. Will give a report on it later -

1230—just finished dinner, which was rice soup. Not too bad, but a bit unappetizing. Jack Muirhead, Herm, Thompson and Bob Newsome are now around to our favorite topic -food. We were talking about frying bananas. Dip the banana in batter and then fry in deep oil. Sounds very good! Dan Wylie went down to the hospital today to have his shoulder checked. He's a lucky boy. Both he and Wood were flying along toward home when they were jumped from six o'clock high by Me 109's. The first sign either one of them had that enemy fighters were present was the shower of tracers hosing by their respective cockpits. At the first pass Wood's right engine blew up and Wylie had a 20mm explode in his cockpit. They both had to hit the silk immediately and so two more 38's were written off the books. I think it's a tribute to the "51's" that neither Lt. Winn nor I were knocked down to direct enemy action. It was the engine in both our cases.

1830 —The lid has blown off this afternoon. Rumors, news reports etc. It's more than one can keep up with. The paper reveals that the drive in Romania has been on for three days and the Russians have made 60 and 70 Km. advances in that time. One rumor had it that Romania has capitulated. Another bit of fairly reliable news is that the Bulgarian army is demobilizing. At any rate, our medics say they are being de-mobilized tomorrow. The news from France is increasingly better. On the 28th of this month the prime minister is to make another speech with (as rumors goes) four main points.

- (1) Disposition of political prisoners
- (2) Separation of prisoners of war.
- (3) Evacuation of all German nationals from Bulgaria
- (4) Unknown.

There is so much good news that it's impossible to write it all. But it all points to the early end of the war.

Friday Aug.25th

Just finished washing and am now awaiting call for breakfast. Hope we have marmalade today. Last night everyone was feeling so good that a spontaneous song session was held. It became quite riotous and all the typical air corps songs were sung, plus a few others

⁴⁸ Captain Dinko Norbert Veherina (Croatia) Bombardier- shot down 11/24/1943

"Christopher Columbus" was the newest one I've heard. I hope today brings more good news and confirmation of some of the rumors.

1000 hours. Just finished my two fried eggs, before which I washed out my khakis, a lot has clouded over -I hope my clothes dry before it rains. Looking back I see that I didn't comment on the turkey croquettes. Shortly and sweetly they were wonderful. We decided to make a banquet out of the affair, so our evening meal consisted of a fried egg, a fried stuffed pepper and three croquettes a piece. It was a meal worth remembering.

That rumor that Romania has capitulated keeps cropping up. Today I certainly hope there is some basis for it. We got in twenty more fellows yesterday which raises the camp to close to three hundred. It's terribly crowded here now -men are staying on the floor, and even the tables in the mess hall are being used for beds. I don't know where we'll put more if any more come in.

The scarcity of reading material here has caused me to remember how I neglected the library in the C.O. before the war. There are so many books there which I'd love to have here. When I get home again I'll use that place much more often and will have to do a lot of reading.

1450—the major⁴⁹ just got back from town and brought in a couple of rumors. According to the people in town Romania has capitulated and the Romanians are now fighting the Germans. Also, the Allies have occupied about four-fifths of France excepting the strip along the German borders. The towns people predict that will be on our way home before the end of the month. News is sure bright for us this month -I'm still holding out for August. With every bit of favorable news, I grow more impatient to be home. All along I thought Bulgaria would be the first country of the Allies to quit the war, but it seems I'm wrong again. And so it would seem events of interest for the day are over. So now I'll go fry myself a couple of eggs -then evening soup, the count, evening bull session and then to bed.

Saturday August 26th

Burr! It was mighty chilly last night and is still cold out this morning (0615). I guess the summer is definitely over in Bulgaria -thank goodness we won't be here when it really gets cold, with no stove, no winter clothing, and one blanket.

⁴⁹ Major Walter Smith

We had a news flash last night just before we had to put our one lantern out. Romania has capitulated and Romanian units are aiding the Russians against the Germans. Moldavia Prince Michael has taken charge of the government and Antonescu⁵⁰ has disappeared.

This news was an unexpected surprise to me -the fellows who are prisoners in Romania are lucky. I'll bet that Bulgaria will announce peace now within a couple of days.

1130 -Surprise! We've been locked inside for the past two hours or so because of an "air raid." I wonder where the planes hit, and whose they were. I have been playing bridge all morning and thus, some more practice. My two weaknesses are betting and keeping track of cards played -will have to practice up on both.

1630 -After all my expectations, this developed into a very dull day. Right now the main topic of discussion is the supposed retreat of the Germans through Shumen. The way I look at it someone voiced a theory which developed into a rumor. According to the story, Jerry is going to make a stand against the Russians somewhere in Bulgaria. Oh will we have something to talk about.

1845 -Time for evening count, and then the great stage production. It finally ready and were all expecting a good evening. It's something to occupy and evening which is always a problem. We usually hold our own private discussion the day before we hit our sacks. Subjects may be anything from morals to foreign policies.

Sunday August 27th

0630 -The show last night was excellent it was rough of course, but that is to be expected. All in all it was an interesting two hours we all spent watching it. I have a hunch we'll hear some hot news today, Lord knows we could stand some good news. I hope my hunch is correct and we get reports of Bulgarians withdrawing from the war. We shall see...

1030 -Just heard that the prime minister is in Russia and us due back in Bulgaria today. Don't know how true it is, but it has possibilities'. Will have to start my monthly letter home. There's nothing to say except that I'm feeling okay -also, I will be home before this letter gets there so it will be a bit of a novelty.

⁵⁰ **Ion Victor Antonescu** -refers to the coup d'état led by **King Michael** of Romania on August 23, 1944 against the pro Nazi Romanian faction of Ion Antonescu. Antonescu enforced policies independently responsible for the deaths of as many as 400,000 people, most of them Bessarabian, Ukrainian and Romanian Jews. He was later captured, tried, convicted and executed in 1946.

1430 -Flash!!! Extra Prema' Poop !!!

Just received word from the news reporters that Bulgaria is "neutral". What they mean by neutral, I don't know. None of us can see how an Axis partner can become neutral without signing a peace pact with the Allies.

Perhaps it's a state other than neutrality, but whatever it is, our position here is immeasurably better and our release is imminent. I doubt if we'll be here at the end of the month. —if we are on our way my prayers will have been answered.

Further developments will show the truth and we'll know what the situation is. Mitchell⁵¹ just came through with a sneer on his face and a lot of pessimistic remarks. "Just a @*%!" rumor" is his comment. I hope it isn't -at least, I got the impression that it was strictly news from the paper. Time will tell.

1700 -Well, it's true. We had a newscast and Bulgaria has declared itself neutral and is disarming all foreign troops (in this case German) within its borders. It is all clear to me now. Bulgaria will remain neutral as long as it takes to disarm all German troops and the country and will then declare itself an Ally or declare war on Germany. In that case, we should be on our way home within two or three days. The rest of the news was very good also -Romanians troops fighting with the Russians, Hungary handed an alternative by the Russia. The Americans in southern France have reached the Italian border 90 km. from Tureen and the Swiss border 8 miles from Geneva. In central France we're still going like blue blazes and Berlin radio is now talking of their armies making a stand behind the Maginot here. The war in this theatre is definitely in its last throes and it is easy to see the once mighty German Wehrmacht crumbling. Bulgaria and then Hungary should be the next to join the Allies and then Hitler's "Fortress Europa" will be no more. Thank God the war is finally ending.

My experiences in combat gave me the greatest thrill of my life, where it was flying skill against the enemy's -with both your lives at stake. But it is the greatest sport on earth. I am confident that I was superior in each contest I had with the jerry. In my last fight, there were just too many 12.5 mm and 20 mm shells filling the air for me to dodge. As much as I enjoyed aerial combat, I'm glad it is ending. It's too much of a constant strain with your nerves and reflexes razor sharp to keep up for any length of time without something in your -mind or soul- snapping. There is a wonderful sensation of triumph bordering on ecstasy -when you see our slugs smashing into the cockpit of the Hun, but it is against man's religion to kill and afterwards one has a feeling of despondency and starts to wonder about "his" own life. He may be an enemy, but first he was a fellow airman -he had experienced the same joys of flying that you have -and still do.

⁵¹ 2nd Lt. George M. Mitchell – P-38 pilot – shot down 12/20/1943

But he will fly no more. No more will he have the thrill of skimming the edges of a towering cloud painted pink by the evening sunset. But he had orders to kill -to destroy our avenging bombers, and we have orders to kill him first.

And so you meet, not as fellow airman, but as men part of a highly sensitive machine with no quarter given or asked⁵². May the best flyer win.

-The fellows are terribly excited, as is to be expected. This is news we've been waiting to hear for so very long. It's going to be a very drunk crowd where we hit the first bar in Turkey.

Monday August 28th

0900 - No news yet, but I imagine we will have beaucoup later on. Today's paper should have some good news for us -hope we have the newscast soon. It's mighty chilly again today -I'm glad we're getting out and on our way home before it gets colder.

1500 - The majors just spoke to the commandant and asked him our status in the face of Bulgaria's declared neutrality. He answered that he did not know if Bulgaria is neutral, and even if so he had no orders for our release. Thus our hopes have been dampened somewhat and we are now once more in the dark as to when we shall be released. I'm still holding out that we'll be on our way home this month. We should have real big news later today or tomorrow if my guess is right.

Tuesday August 29th

0830 - Still no news, but Major Clark is going to see the colonel in town in regard to our status. I doubt very much if he'll find out much more than what we already know. I hope that my guess is right and we get big news today. Quite a few fellows are going around predicting that we'll be interned and won't get out till the end of the war, but they are the ones without anything between their ears. So now I'll just have to wait till we get some more news.

1400 - Still no news. The majors went to town this morning, but as yet, have not returned. Perhaps they're learning more than I expected. This noon we had the rumor that Hungary has severed relations with Germany and is preparing to capitulate. We'll have to wait till news comes in to see if that is true.

⁵² Under the laws of war "it is especially forbidden ... to declare that no quarter will be given" this was established under Article 23 (d) of the 1907 Hague Convention IV- A victor gives no quarter when the victor shows no clemency or mercy and refuses to spare the life in return for the surrender at discretion (unconditional surrender) of a vanquished opponent.

1530 - FLASH! The majors just got back from town and brought terrific news from their conference with the town commandant. First and best -Major Smith sent a telegram to the American Consul in Ankara requesting he expedite our release. Also, they were told the minister of war has already begun negotiations with U.S. diplomats in regard to our release. Then too, we were granted privileges for the remainder of our stay (the colonel said it is a matter of only days).

- We are going to be allowed outside the fence to play ball.
- We are to be allowed to town in groups of 50 or so to shop and go to the movies.
- Beer is going to be brought up tomorrow or so.

This is the best news we've had so far -before I forget, there is another privilege which we are to have. That is, we shall have daily newspapers. Bulgaria definitely doesn't regard us as prisoners of war and yet the colonel said the U.S. doesn't recognize neutrality of the country. It's a "snafu"⁵³ situation, but it all for the best. The majors also brought up some new rumors. The German troops here are being held as hostages pending the release of their war workers in German and Austria. The Americans are 150km from Germany, etc. With all this encouraging news, the morale has jumped 50%, I hope it stays there.

Wednesday August 30th

0630 - Last night was wonderful for sleeping. Normally the early birds are stirring between five and five thirty, but when I got up a little before six -only two or three fellows were up. I guess the news yesterday put everyone's mind at rest. Today we'll have our first legal newscast, and I understand the news is very good.

1130 -Just came back in from outside the fence. One thing has to be said in credit of this place -it has a beautiful view. We can't see it from inside the fence but by walking to the top of the rise in front of the camp the view stretches across the entire valley. We're situated on the top (edge) of a sheer bluff which rises fully fifteen hundred feet above the floor of the valley. About ten miles away there is another abrupt ridge and about ten miles beyond there is another. But I'd rather see those views from the window of a train on its way to Turkey. And hopefully enough, that will be very soon. Murphy just passed by and I noticed he is as brown as a berry. I guess I seem just as brown to others. His hand is completely healed now and is hardly noticeable. He is Brawn timer's ⁵⁴ co- pilot on a B-24 and they are the only members of their crew here. The others bailed out over Romania when the ship was burning and the pilots bailed out and luckily landed on this side of the Danube. Murphy landed hard and was lying on his back testing his limbs when he was

⁵³ SNAFU – a confused or chaotic state; a mess

⁵⁴ 2nd Lt. Earl W. Brawn timer – pilot –shot down 6/11/1944

charged by a Bulgarian with a bayonet and rifle. Murphy jumped up dodged the bayonet and grabbed it and took the damn thing away from the Bulgar. When he grabbed the bayonet he slashed the side of his hand pretty badly, but it is okay now.

When Brawninger was captured he was taken to the local town hall and while he was standing there some brave civilian sneaked up behind him and hit him in the neck with a thick cane. "Bo" says his knees buckled - but the cane broke too. I guess I was lucky in never actually being man handled except for thumps in the back with a rifle to hurry me up.

Thursday August 31

0830 - Nothing new yet, but we'll have a newscast later on and then too -if the colonel comes up today - as he said he would -we might have some good news in regard to us.

We had the rumor last night that the *Germans* started using gas in France, but I believe that it is false. They have too much to lose by starting it.

P.P. - see Joe Harlore and see if there is an opening in Republic.

1030 - Just came in from my morning sun bath, and collected a rumor while there. It seems that Bulgaria has agreed to accept Allied terms for peace and will announce the decision tonight or tomorrow.

1630 - Well, some news and some rumors came in and everyone is feeling fine again. A cartload of shoes just came in for the boys without any footwear. The news declared that the Russians are still moving swiftly in Romania, and the Allies are pounding the *Germans* senseless in France. Now for the rumors -the Russians do not recognize Bulgaria's neutrality and Russia has demanded that the Bulgars declare war on Germany within 36 hours.

1730 - Had to dash out when I heard something about a phonograph and sure enough, it was true. It's a brand new portable, with about 20 unused records. The songs are all three and five years old but they sure do sound good to our ears. Before I forget, I want to put down here something which has me worried. Last night I had a spasm of intense stomach pains which lasted for a little over thirty minutes. I had a previous spell a month or so ago and I am wondering if it's entirely due to this food, or if it is from ulcers or appendicitis. This would be a terrible place to be stuck with a serious ailment, and it's no wonder I worry about it. When I get back to the states, I'll have to check up on it.

Friday September 1st

Breakfast is over and so we begin another day. I never expected to see the month here, but -as usual- I'm wrong. The news last night was very encouraging -the Americans in France have driven to 50km of the Belgium border and 150km of the German border. They have taken Rouen, Chateau Thierry and have reached Le Havre. The situation looks very good there. In Romania the Russians have pushed 50km past Constantia and are fighting in the Ploesti oil fields. The Bulgarian cabinet was in session on the thirtieth and the prime minister is conferring with the Soviet ambassador. We should hear news of Bulgarian peace today or tomorrow in my estimation.

1115 -Part of the big news has come in -the Russians are driving on Varna and their armored columns are expected to drive on Sofia when that part is taken. This is real excitement for us because their route will take them to Shumen. The report also says that the British have ready to push across the Turkish border. This is real news, and I hope we get more this afternoon.

1145 -Another surprise!!! The beer just came up and I have already finished mine. The Bulgarians sure are "brown nosing" us in this -The eleventh hour. Now if we get paid today it will sure be a sure sign were about to be released

(P.S. -we didn't get paid)

Saturday September 2nd

1200 -A very, very dull morning. I spent the greater part of it finishing "The Woman on the Beast" a very odd book. There are many rumors floating around, most of them concerning the Russians. "They went through Shumen last night" / "They'll be going thru this afternoon", etc. Nothing tangible though.

The majors went to town this morning, and I expect they will bring some news back with them. Also, this morning fifteen hundred odd packets of Bulgarian soldier issue were brought in. I understand that each of us is to receive five packs. There are eight pretty lousy cigarettes in each packet but since I'm running low -it is something to smoke.

1530 -Well, the majors got back and our morale dropped 50%. No bad news, just that there was really no good news. The government is changing again, but why we don't know. The majors were told by the colonel that there is a conference going on in Cairo between Allied and Bulgarian officials. Also the Russians are poised on the north eastern border of this God-forsaken country -waiting for the results of the conference, I suppose. We have a newspaper, and when the newscast is given I'll list the developments. -The news was read at 0730 and it certainly was good. The Allies in France have occupied almost the entire country, and have entered Belgium. In Romania the Russians took Ploesti and Bucharest and

are driving south toward Juju -and Bulgaria. The paper announced a change of the cabinet in Bulgaria and that negotiations are proceeding in Cairo. The terms were agreed upon by the Allies and were drawn up in London and now all Bulgaria has to do is sign.

Sunday September 3rd

0830 -Morning count is over and at last -and surprise! We got another bar of soap plus four soldiers packets of cigarettes. I now have four bars of soap. Why this generosity I don't know. For almost two months we went without enough and then they give us more than we can use.

1530 -Seven new prisoners came in a half hour ago, including a Lt. Col. The rank we're getting!! "Bo" brought in the rumor, supposedly from the newspaper that one thousand PWs were flown out of Romania to Italy. That's great news for those boys -but why doesn't something like that happen to us? I am getting so impatient sitting in this stinking unimportant little country while the Allies allow them to prolong the signing of peace. We must have mighty poor diplomats to let this country stall around so long.

Labor Day!! Monday September 4th

0615 -The newscast last night sure made the end look near. One column is in Belgium and another is in Luxembourg, fourteen miles from the German border. In Romania the Reds have taken Juju and are advancing west along the northern bank of the Danube. No news at all about Bulgaria. If we don't get some soon, I'll be a confirmed pessimist. Incidentally, it was true that American prisoners were flown out of Romania. I made a bet with Rice⁵⁵ yesterday that we won't be in Turkey next Sunday. The stakes are a good drunk in the first place we can get good liquor.

1015 -Just had a fried egg sandwich that was very tasty. No news today yet, but everyone expects really big things today. The biggest and best news we could get would be the news that Bulgaria has signed the Allied peace terms. Time will tell -Well, I'll be damned! An air raid alarm! I wonder who would be bombing this country.

1430 -Still no news. Lt. Col. Graff who came in a day or so ago, this morning voiced what happens to returned PWs. According to him, after getting our records straightened out, we will be told to report to the field nearest our home and from there will go on leave. When we get back home from that we will be sent to a rehabilitation center where we will be given a choice of two courses. (1.) Be immediately discharged from the army or (2.) be transferred to the regular army with a permanent commission.

⁵⁵ Lt. David P. Rice- navigator-shot down 6/23/44

So now my plans are shaping up. While on leave I will investigate all the possibilities I have listed. If some pan out, I will accept the regular army commission. But while I am there I must not let any grass grow under my feet. I shall look closely into each possibility, for the army has its drawbacks.

1730 -A couple of the Yugo's just came back from town and claim to have heard on the radio that the Bulgaria will sign terms the first part of next week.

Damn it all to hell! I'm getting so blasted discouraged at the news. Each week we have hopes of getting out and it never comes. It's useless to have any definite hopes -I'm going to forget all predictions and rumors and just live from day to day with the knowledge that one day soon we'll be walking out the gate for the last time.

Tuesday September 5th

Today -dawned grey and foreboding -It's a tossup whether or not will have rain. Rain or no rain, it will be a wonderful day if we get some good news and get paid. I'm getting mighty low in leva and without money to buy eggs and cigarettes, life would be miserable. During the newscast last night, the major was summoned to the commandant's room. I understand the main topic was inventory with a discussion of the war situation following. The commandant claims we'll be out in two or three days. Perhaps he's right.

1400 -Siesta time... The vendor brought in a paper but, evidently there's no sensational news in it. The rumor that peace terms are to be signed next week has been confirmed and now we're hoping for a deal similar to the one the boys in Romania got, and to be flown to Italy before the terms are signed.

Around nine o'clock this morning, Major Smith was summoned to town by the colonel on what seemed to be an urgent matter. He hasn't returned yet and we're all predicting why he was called.

1730 -the major isn't back yet and everyone is hoping for big news, yet we are all afraid to raise our hopes for fear of having them dashed to the ground. Half an hour ago two twin engine planes flew over the camp at about 12,000 to 15,000 feet. This is the seventh or eighth time planes have done this. A few were obvious photo ships, but whose - we never know. They're always too high for recognition. Hope the jerries don't drop a load of eggs on us for spite one of these days.

Well -now to sweat out the major's return and what news he'll bring.

1830 - He's back and no news.....

Wednesday September 6th

0630 -Had a newscast after evening count and the Allies are still pushing the Germans back in France, Italy and Romania. Only one thing about Bulgaria -terms will signed with the Allies the first part of next week. We all were hoping that we'd be released before terms were signed as happened in Romania. But now we all expect to remain in this hole a couple of weeks after peace is declared and terms signed. Evidently the U.S. Gov't doesn't give a hoot about us or how long we stay here. We never did get a reply to the major's telegram. So now I'm resigned to the fact that we'll spend two weeks or so longer here in our Bulgarian retreat and will try to wait "patiently" for our release.

1100 -At last things have popped. First we were paid this morning -5600 leva. Now for the reports floating around -Our new commandant (he arrived this morning) said that last night Russia declared war on Bulgaria & that in reply, Bulgaria declared war on Germany. How it fits in I don't know. German troops are said to be fighting the Bulgarians in Serbia and Bulgar troops are massed along the Greek border to prevent German troops in Greece from forcing their way thru. If Russia doesn't recognize Bulgaria's "peace terms" and starts advancing in Bulgaria, the troops are to lay down their arms and help the Russians thru the country. According to the officer who came with the paymaster, we "*hi-dee*" tomorrow When the Russians reach Shumen, as they are expected to do late this afternoon or tonight. All this news is swell -if true—but I'm trying not to let my hopes rise too high. I'm afraid that they'll turn out false, or something else will happen which will prolong our stay here. At any rate, I'll continue to list developments as they come in. This morning I got Cecil⁵⁶ to cut my hair and a damn good job he did on it. I'll shave this afternoon so I will be set in case things do happen tomorrow....

1300 -While standing in the chow line we had another interesting event. The war minister called the office of the commandant to find how many prisoners are here (American, British, etc.). What this means I don't know, but I hope it has something to do with our release

1430 - Lakitz? Lackitch?⁵⁷ (*Good enough*) just got back from town and brought an additional lot of news for us. He heard a German broadcast which confirmed some of the reports, yet clouded the part as to the chronology. It stated that Russia was moving thru Bulgaria and (propaganda) they would proceed to clear to the Dardanelles. It also stated that Bulgaria capitulated to the Russians 24 hours after (??) declaration of war by the Russians. Confusing isn't it?

⁵⁶ Sgt. Cecil C. Corbin – waist gunner- shot down 1/24/1944

⁵⁷ 2nd Lt. Ognyan Ivan Lakich (Serbian) waist gunner- Yugoslavian crew member-shot down 11/23/1943

1700 -This will probably be the last rumor of an inspiring day. According to Capt. Stan⁵⁸ the commandant said that late tomorrow afternoon 20 C-47's will pick us up and take us to Italy. Immediately after lunch we will go to town and spend the afternoon shopping. Then in the late afternoon the C-47's will land and take us aboard.

Thursday September 7th

It's a beautiful morning and I hope we have good news to go with it. I just found myself whistle along "April play the fiddle." It's the most popular recording we have in our meager collection and one hears it often. Whenever I hear that song in the future it certainly will bring back thoughts of this place.

1000 - HI DEE !! (I hope)

1015 -Wrong again -the commandant says the straw wagon brought up is for mattresses. It's sure odd to have three officers lead a column of thirsty horse drawn wagons filled with straw for our mattresses. Also, there's a civilian here with a camera. We were told he would be up here today but the cavalcade is a surprise. Why do we have to be disappointed so?? It's a sorry sight to see the fellows after such a disappointment. Oh well, someday we will leave-

1500 -We have a couple of papers and I understand the news is pretty good. Russia has declared war on Bulgaria, and Bulgaria has severed relations with Germany, Italy, Austria etc. The old Bulgarian Merry-go-round is turning faster every day. Where we'll end up, I don't know.

Friday September 8th

A beautiful day, but no invigorating news -the major says that the commandant has the papers for our release on his desk, and as soon as peace is signed, all he has to do is sign it and we're on our way. So now we have to sweat out the peace -how much longer?

1930 -Dan Wylie just brought in a good rumor, but from a not too reliable source. The doctor claims he heard a broadcast last night which stated that all war prisoners would be released within 48 hours. It's a pretty fair report but hasn't aroused any excitement because after yesterday everyone refuses to believe any spectacular rumors.

⁵⁸ Capt. Dragisha M. Stanislavjevic, pilot (Serbian) Yugoslavian crew member-shot down 11/23/1943

1100 -Well, here is real big news. The major just called a formation and announced that peace has been signed and the colonel in town has warned us to be ready to leave at any hour. Everyone is on top of the world now and yesterday's hoax is forgotten. Now our big problem is to dispose of various items of food we have. I have -in my basket -some apples, a kilo of onions, some tomatoes, and some cooking oil. Oh well, one hell of a big frying spree will fix it up.

1500 -My flying suit is almost dry and I can now breathe easy. I washed it immediately after dinner and was hoping it would be dry in case we left this afternoon. Early this afternoon a Russian plane flew over Shumen and dropped beaucoup pamphlets, congratulating them on being out of the war. It also listed the terms of the peace, plus some other poop. The fellows in town should bring back some good news -hope they get back soon.



*Line drawing
from page 105 of
Lt. Hanson's diary*

1600 -The big news arrived!!! Since this morning we have been "free men."

Major Smith and Lt. Col. Graff⁵⁹ are going to fly to Sofia tonight with the names & serial numbers of everyone here. Tomorrow morning we turn in our bedding and such and then we can go to town but we must be back here by 1500. Then we all march down to town and board the 1710 for Istanbul. Oh Lord, this is terrific! I just gave my khakis to one of the crippled fellows as all he as to where are Bulgarian clothes. The first fellows to go out the gate as free men were the two boys with legs gone. It was a beautiful sight to see them, outlined against the sky, as they hobbled up the rise and stopped at the top to scan the hill far distant.

⁵⁹ Major Smith flew to Sofia in a small German Stork plane – Lt. Graff remained with the men at the camp.

Saturday September 9th

0715 - The day is really starting right -cracked open a bottle of cognac a few minutes ago and this "inaugurated" our first day of our travels home. There are six of us in a compartment of a train bound for Sofia. We left Shuman station at two o'clock last night and after a hectic night of trying to sleep, stopped at six o'clock in a station where we bought beaucoup buns, rolls, bread and cognac. I can see this is going to be a happy trip. We received news of our urgent departure yesterday, a half hour after we were told we would be leaving at 1710 today. It had something to do with the Russians advancing on Shuman and reports of disorder in the town. We left the camp at eleven last night and were driven in trucks directly to the station where we waited for a special train to be hooked up. It is wonderful to be actually on our way.

0800 -The cognac is being removed from the bottles steadily and before long we should be feeling fine.

1700 -Still moving. Stopped at one town for a couple of hours and when we pulled out we were five fellows short. We didn't continue on to Sofia as planned, but for some reason we returned to the town we stopped at where we bought the cognac and then rambled on to some junction city where the five boys caught up with us. We're getting nowhere fast-

Sunday September 10th

0800 -After being here in this town since 12 o'clock last night, it looks as though we're finally going to be hitched up and continue on to Turkey. While coming down here we picked up a few more bottles of brandy and killed them by nine o'clock.

It was a very pleasant evening. When we pulled in to the station we were met by some pro-Germans who thought we were Germans. They said they would help disarm all the Bulgars and take over the train. We reported this to the commandant here and all night long the "soldats"⁶⁰ were rounding up those civilians. Just heard that Sofia and Shumen were bombed by the Germans and that our camp was strafed.^{*61} I'd say we got out just in time... Now to hope we get started for Istanbul.

⁶⁰ Soldats -French for soldiers

⁶¹ *just another un-true rumor

Monday September 11th

0730 -We did get started, in fact -right now we're only a short distance from Istanbul. We picked Major Smith up at a border town where we changed trains. He said that the Russians were only two hours behind us and they (in Sofia) at times thought we were over taken. We crossed the border at 1715 and immediately started downing our stock of rotgut. At our first stop in Turkey we had a snack and continued on. We had to pass thru Greece and at one stop they had a wonderful reception for us. Fully a thousand or more Greeks cheered us and sang songs for us. None of us will ever forget that. We stayed up till midnight -drinking till two or three -passed out. It was a terrific drunk.

1230 -Here we are in Istanbul on board a ship in the harbor. We arrived around nine this morning and after taken to the Turkish liner Istanbul where we are going to spend the night. Sometime tomorrow we will leave the ship and board a train for Syria. It's disappointing that we won't be able to see a little of this city, but evidently they're in a rush to get us home.

From where I sit the city seems very intriguing. It's evidently divided into old and new sections. Around the old part of the city there are the remains of a wall which evidently at one time encircled the city proper. It has deteriorated quite some, but it is still good enough condition for its age. I dozens of "praying towers" and there are several Mosques scattered about the town which we can see quite clearly. I believe I can see the one which is known world-wide -the Grand Mosque. It seems from here, quite a bit larger than the others, and more elaborate looking. Toward the east I can see bluish silhouette (??) of what seems to be the other shore of the Dardanelles⁶². The other side is Asia Minor into which we can cross tomorrow. We will have quite a trip before taking the ship for home. It's so very peaceful sitting here that it seems impossible that only twenty-four hours ago...

Tuesday September 12th

1830 -Immediately after finishing the above, the committee from the embassy called on a small steamer and we had a wonderful ride up the Bosphorus⁶³ to the Black Sea and back. It was an extremely interesting trip, but it made me regret that we'd have no time to really see the city. Dinner was almost ready when we got back so after a hot (1st in 3 months) shower I have my second delicious meal of solid food - 2nd in about 3 months. We "retired" to the lounge where ice cream was served and then beat a retreat to our cabins.

⁶² Dardanelles – A strait connecting the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara

⁶³ Bosphorus – a strait that forms part of the boundary between Europe and Asia.

I fell asleep almost immediately and didn't awaken till eight o'clock this morning. It was my first night in a real bed with a mattress since being overseas. What a wonderful sleep!

This morning we discarded our clothes and were issued Turk army uniforms. They don't fit, but they are clean and we get a kick out of wearing them. We boarded the train for Syria at noon and we have just stopped at a small village in the hills of a really rugged villiage. We were in it for fully three hours and I'm not sure we're out of it yet. Very beautiful countryside with massive crags, and sheer rock cliffs rising a good five hundred feet or so up. The railroad line runs in the gorges whenever it can, but quite frequently has to burrow through a mountain like a mole.

The American Consul is really wonderful to us, for since we've been in their hands we've been treated royally. I'm not sure, but I believe we have about ten cars in our "Special Train" and two of them are dinners. I believe we have one or two civilian cars also. The food is absolutely out of this world -with beer at every meal. While in Istanbul the Consul bought 2,000 bottles of beer for us and on this train we have 2,500 bottles of beer and 500 bottles of wine.

In our compartment there are four of us and we've spent the afternoon reading back issues of magazines and eating candy given by the people back in Istanbul. One more thing just before we boarded the train, we spoke to two real American girls. Both from Minnesota and worked in a government agency there. What a sight for we fellows -they were also cutely beautiful.

Wednesday September 13th

1500 -The only event of mention today has been the scenery. We were in the desert or tundra for most of the day, but for the past few ours we have been in a territory with a good number of trees and some green grass. Wish I had a map of this area so I could trace the route -but I'm doing the next best, and listing the names of most of the places thru which we pass.

All day I have been reading back issues of Time, Newsweek, The N.Y.'er etc. and have gotten a lot of enjoyment of it.

Thursday September 14th

We're getting in more rugged country now, with more trees and grass -should be in Syria before very long. Have read most of the magazines by now and the hours are beginning to drag. I hope we get to that ATC base shortly. From there I imagine we'll go to Cairo, and then home. The U.S. is getting closer every minute and believe me it's a good feeling.

Friday September 15th

1300 -Right now we're at Payne Field in Cairo, doing nothing -but hoping that we'll be leaving here soon for Italy. Shortly after I entered the above notes, we stopped at a station which was in Syria. And there were beaucoup British trucks waiting for us. They hauled out cigarettes and had tea and sandwiches there. As we piled in the trucks they gave us each a bottle of beer and we were off to Aleppo⁶⁴ We literally jumped off the trucks (at the ATC base in Aleppo) and climbed into waiting C-47's and C-46's. We arrived here at 1930 or so last night and received a complete new set of clothes. It's wonderful to wear a new set of khakis again.

Saturday September 16th

1630 -Received a partial payment of \$25 today which is a God send. I will have to buy a souvenir or two before we leave (which will be tomorrow). There are quite a few B-17's and B-24's already here from the 15th A.F. which will fly us back to Italy. It won't be long before we'll be on that last lap to the States -what a swell thought. Now to head for the PX and some ice cream.

Tuesday September 19th

Early Sunday morning we boarded a fleet of B-24's and B-17's which landed us at Bari⁶⁵ late that afternoon. We were met by General Twinning and taken to a replacement camp where we are still located. We're all anxious to get back to our outfits and then start home, but the red tape and paperwork is holding us up.

⁶⁴ Aleppo –the capital of Syria

⁶⁵ Bari, Italy –Headquarters for the 15th Air Force



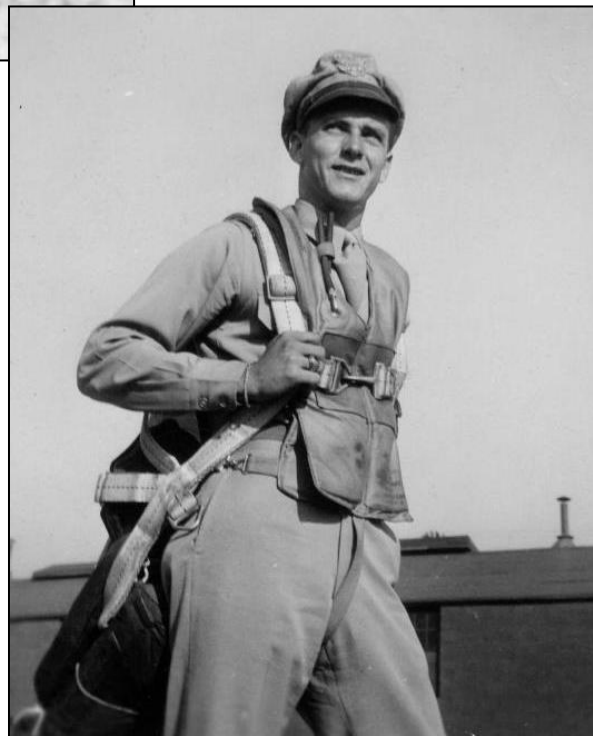
Lt. David Graham Hanson
POW #126 of the Shumen camp.

A P-51 fighter pilot with the 325th fighter group – a group respectfully named “The Checker Tails”.

He was 22 years old and on his 19th mission when he was captured after parachuting from his disabled plane over Bulgaria.

He was discharged from the service in October of '45. He returned to civilian life, married, had six children and was employed for forty two years as a government bond dealer.

David Hanson passed away on October 28, 2012 at the age of 90.



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The final page in Hanson's diary

