

December 2, 1944

Dear Ford, *JOE. About "Old Faithful"*

Thanks for the newsy letter. I felt sure Capt. Danko had got in touch with you by this time. Perhaps he has by now, but will do my best to give the details anyhow.

Will have to add my regrets in not seeing you while here in L.A. Think what a shock to have me walk up, and give you a pat on the back while thinking me among the angels, or vice versa.

I was surprised to know you had bothered to carry the camera home and the loader and such I had given up as lost. The only thing sent to me was my photograph album. Thanks for getting this much back. Losing the film was really a blow, the rest I didn't mind so much.

Charlotte, a friend in Tucson, wrote and said Col. Munn was now head man at Davis Monthan. I would say it was a break for him.

➤ Now for the fatal mission last May 6th. A gloomy day if I remember right. On or near the I.P. an explosion and hard, the ship lurched over on its side and then went in a dive. It must have been fighters, but I'm not sure. The concussion threw me from my seat on a 50 cal. box and hard against the left waist or just to the rear of it. I had a nice egg where my head hit. Fire in the bomb bay came through the waist like from a flow torch. Blum left but quick via the left waist, I couldn't see him but knew he went. I thought Collins followed him, but was wrong on this. I couldn't see for a few seconds and this might have been due to smoke, I'm not sure. I was in a half sitting position on the floor and a little dazed when the fire got too hot and snapped me out of the lithurgy. I also left by the left waist. A grand feeling it was too to be out in that clean fresh air. Thanks to that new back type chute, I made it.

RAY D. - Blum and I were brought together shortly after landing by the soldiers and peasants. They helped me to a cottage where they dressed a few spots where shrapnel had hit me. Blum was not hurt. That night in a small village jail and the next morning by truck to Campalung and the jail house there. "Old Faithful" blew up before I pulled my rip cord, and I saw only two chutes besides my own. Blum and I were both surprised to run into Danko, Stevens and Red here. We thought all of them dead, and up to this time thought Collins had been in the 3d chute and the natives had led us to believe he died in landing. The third man had been Stevens, while Red and Danko were blown free of the ship when it went to pieces, and pulled their rip cords just before hitting the ground.

Red Buschard had a 6" gash on his head and a sprained hand. Danko a gash on his shin, and Stevens who left via the top hatch bruises and torn clothes.

Danko ~~saw~~ saw Collins and Pete and the ball gunner and the navigator, all of them dead. The bombardier's chute was found not open, but no sign of him. I still feel bad about Pete and Collins. It would have been good to have them make it.

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In jail over night there, and at five A.M. by train to Bucharest. The Germans walked through our car and stared while a few talked and gave us cigarettes. The Jerrys were really thick, and we weren't sure then whether they would take us over or not. At five P.M., after stopping for 15th A.A.F. raids, we stopped outside the marshalling yards. They were a mess of debris and twisted rails, etc. A real job of bombing there - a real mess.

They walked us from here for a mile or so, and the day before app. 10,000 people had been killed and many of the finer homes destroyed. The people were most unkind, cussing and spitting and shaking their fists at us. We were glad for the guards.

A truck and ride around the bombed parts of the city with people still digging in the ruins; the guards made us look at the wreckage. Finally to the Kings Garrison where they searched us again and locked us up in a tank. After four weeks here I was sent to the hospital, my foot had a hole and chunk of metal in it, and was badly infected by this time. While in the hospital we had several rough bombings and I mean bombs dropping all around us by the 15th during the day and the English at night. We were locked in the former crazy ward with heavy bars on the windows and guards all around. We would crawl under the beds to escape flying glass and such and sweat.

The bombs clattering and whistling and the buildings shaking as if going to pieces and bombs exploding with the ripping and tearing noise of the hits is really hell. It's as though all the hate and revenge in the world was engulfing you. Yes you sweat and pray like never before.

While in the hospital the officers and Enlisted Men were separated. The officers going to a former girl's school and the E.M. moved to the hospital area. They built a barbed wire stockade around the hospital building we were in and one smaller one, and used for our dormitories. We were here until the end of the P.O.W. (prisoner of War) days.

I was released from the hospital on the last of July and started planning on escape with several other chaps. I still have a scale map I drew but never had to use.

After the separation, from what I heard, the officers had fairly decent food and also credits, and were able to buy cigarettes and pastry, which helped them a lot.

The E.M. had 1 slice bread, sour, for breakfast, a cup of what they called tea; it was warm at least. For lunch soup and bread, and the same for dinner. It was mostly onion top or string bean soup. I was hungry all the time and the soup was just an appetizer or teaser.

The bombing was quite frequent and perhaps the worst feature of any other part of our stay. Of course the bed bugs and lice almost ate us up. I managed to swipe two sheets from the hospital, which I kept hid during the day; this helped a lot.

The first few weeks Danko and Stevens and Blum sold their C.I. watches, and we were able to get bread and salami and cigarettes. This also helped a lot then. From the hospital on I smoked butts when I could find them, or rolled tobacco from butts in paper out to size from old bags and such.

My foot gave me trouble and kept me from getting around too well until after my release from the hospital, and then it was several weeks before it toughened up. On the 23d of August, Rumania capitulated, and then the Germans started their blitz. I went for three days and nights without sleep or food during the bombing. They threw every kind of ship they had into this and raised plenty of hell. Our buildings and the whole area were pretty well razed by then. Our slit trenches would buckle and seem to be caving in, and then for some reason slowly go back in place again. This on near hits of 25 to 40' away along with the bombing they were fighting in the city and around it. The big guns going and ships strafing and snipers all through the city kept us pretty much on our toes. We, 40 or 50 of us, evacuated the boys from the hospital during this and used doors for stretchers. We took them to the 3d floor of a building of concrete and under construction but used for an air raid shelter.

On the 27th, I believe, we were taken by truck to a camp outside the city and from there to Bari, Italy, on the 31st - a real thrill to see the P-51s and P-38s buzzing the field and the B-17s landing to pick us up. My greatest thrill was setting foot on the Bari Field after landing there.

It's midnight and I'm going for some coffee and then back to the base and bed. I hope this will give you an idea of my thoughts of Bucharest and being a P.O.W. there. One day when I see you I'll give you and fill in what you probably ~~cannot~~ can't read of my writing.

My best wishes to Mrs. Ford and luck to you.

GEO. FOWLER