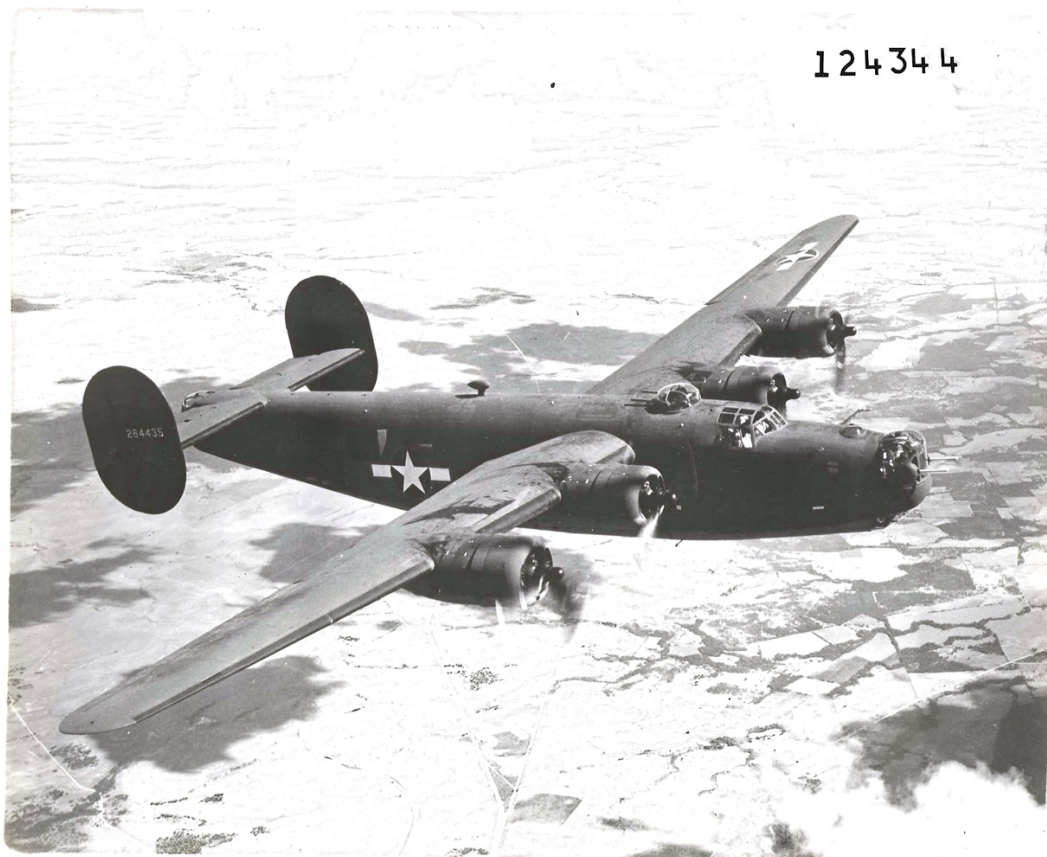


67 days as a POW in Romania  
During the Summer of 1944  
As Recorded in the Diary of  
Sgt. Robert T. Curran  
of the 450<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group  
722<sup>nd</sup> Squadron



## Preface

1. **The primary source:** The diary that I've transcribed is not copied from the original. The original copy still exists though I've never seen it. I am working from a typed transcription created from the original in 1991 by Bob and Jean's oldest daughter.
2. **Footnotes and added information:** The footnotes are not a part of the original diary, obviously. I've included them for clarity's sake. Most are informative and are credited when possible. This was written as a long letter to his wife, so it makes sense that it does not read like a traditional military memoire.
3. **Names:** I identify the main players as 'Bob' and 'Jeanne' or 'Jean' throughout. It felt weird calling a couple of people barely out of their teens 'Grandpa' and 'Nanny'. I add details to others named when possible and I make educated guesses about who it is Bob may be talking about based on context, date references, and cross-referencing with other sources.
4. **Grammar, mechanics, spelling:** I do not want to change what Bob wrote, but I do want to make it easier to read. I changed grammar when it came to some spelling (too vs. to, it's vs its) and some simple punctuation for a sense of rhythm. I stay loyal to word choice. I use the Romanian spelling of cities because that helped me find these places on the map. The spacing of paragraphs is my choice, again, in attempt to make the story easier to read. There are some instances where I had to make guesses at what he wrote or what he meant if the meaning could be confusing. I try to be transparent in my level of confidence with these guesses. With the first-person witnesses to these things long since passed, I did the best I could in trying to be true to Bob and his experience with the information I had.

-Matt Picchietti (Second child to Bob and Jeanne's eighth child)

### **Sgt. Robert. T. Curran**

Bob wanted to fly but 'washed out' of pilot training. Luckily, a plane's crew needed more than just a pilot. A B-24 crew included ten soldiers. Bob certified as a gunner, both tail and waist, and as a bombardier.

Known Military Awards:

**Air Medal with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters:** Heroic or meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight.

**Prisoner of War Medal:** Not instituted until 1985. Bob earned it and there are records of this being awarded to him, but there is no record if he took receipt of it and no one in the family seems to have it.

**Good Conduct Medal:** Awarded to members of the United States Army and Army Air Forces for exemplary conduct, efficiency, and fidelity or who honorably completed three years of active service.

In 1947 his first baby was born and then they pretty much kept being born until 1963. Ten total. He buried himself in work, his family, and having fun when he could. He went to Mass. His family grew. He made a lot of money then lost a lot of it. Peaks and valleys. A lot of love, some painful losses. He built a good life for his family. He died surrounded by those who loved him and stories are still shared about him, some of which are even true, more than 30 years later.

## Sgt. Robt Curran Now Prisoner in Romania

Sgt. Robert T. Curran, waist gunner in a 15th Army Air force B-24 Liberator group, husband of Mrs. Jeanne Curran of 138 South East avenue, and son of Mr. and Mrs. Roy E. Curran of 1400 William, is a prisoner of war in Romania, according to word received last week by the family.



Sgt. Robert Curran Reported missing in action shortly after he had received the air medal and two oak leaf clusters for meritorious achievement, Sgt. Curran was a member of the bomber group which saw much decisive offensive action against the enemy in Europe, particularly in air assaults upon industrial Germany, France, Northern Italy and the Balkans. He is a prisoner of the Romanian government and had taken part previously in the bombing of the Ploesti oil fields there.

Bob was a graduate of Fenwick High school and attended DePauw university. While studying law at Notre Dame university, he enlisted in the army air corps in June, 1942.

Charles Curran, his 19-year-old brother, entered the armed service in September, 1943, and on June 24 (the day his brother was reported missing) left for overseas duty with an engineer's base equipment company. A cable received by his



Charles Curran

parents last Sunday stated he had arrived somewhere overseas. Charles attended Fenwick High school for three years and finished at Loras Military academy at Du-

Article featuring two of the Curran boys from the first week of July, 1944. Unknown newspaper, unknown publication date.



**June 24, 1944**

Took off as usual<sup>1</sup>, but we were flying a different ship - new engineer - Wavra<sup>2</sup>. Slept in the rear while forming, as usual, target was the big one, first trip over for me. Great anxiety. Test fired guns over Bulgaria. Not too good.

Before I.P. donned a flak suit and helmet, began sweating, run on target. Heard pilot ask for help on the rudders - no soap, dropped away from my box - straggled, hopped, from all positions of clock by M.E.s. My gun was fifty percent operative, not so good.

20 MM came through the camera hat. Another hit the ball turret. There were three of us in-between. An act of God that weren't hit<sup>3</sup>. I opened the hatch - donned parachute, was going to jump, oxygen, headset, sucked oxygen hose - another hit on the control deck which started a fire.

Collins tried to put it out. I jumped first - John<sup>4</sup> second and Collins<sup>5</sup> third. Knuckles<sup>6</sup> came later. It was a great sensation to jump. After the chute opened, I saw an M.E. headed for me. I thought he would strafe - thank God he didn't. I looked up and saw two more chutes and waved to them. I was at fifteen thousand feet. I looked down, saw a large lake, but I was falling away from it.

I never imagined a place without noise, but up in a chute, there is no noise. I started singing to myself. Never seemed to

<sup>1</sup> Bob was shot down on his 24<sup>th</sup> mission with the Cottontails. On this flight, he was a waist gunner, located in the middle belly of a B-24 Liberator in a ball turret.

<sup>2</sup> Sgt. Rubin T. Wavra, engineer.

<sup>3</sup> At least one member of the crew was hit. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Robert Gruber took a massive round to the leg. Miraculously, it did not destroy the leg or kill him. He parachuted out and was picked up in the Danube River and held as a POW in Bulgaria. Gruber wore the bullet on a necklace after he got home. (Worthington, 1999)

<sup>4</sup> Sgt. John J. Krezeminski, a gunner

<sup>5</sup> Sgt. Frederick H. Collins, Jr., radio operator

<sup>6</sup> Sgt. James D. Knuckles was the tail gunner. Bob was supposed to be tail but, at just under six feet tall and weighing more than 200 pounds, he did not fit well in the tail gunner's tight spot so he and Knuckles switched before that ill-fated flight. That Knuckles survived was a great relief to Bob.

come close to the ground. The chute harness hurt my groin. Looked down again and saw peasants run from the spot where I would land. I bent my knees for a shock.

Hit and fell on my fanny, immediately removed harness and life vest. Looked around, no one in sight. I gathered chute and vest and concealed them in the high grass under my jacket. I began to run toward John and saw that the peasants took off across the field towards us. Two on horseback approached. I ducked down. They dismounted twenty yards away.

I drew my .45, chambered a shell - only thought of Ustachis. I approached them with gun in hand. They lowered their rifles. I lowered my pistol and looked around. I was surrounded by at least a hundred peasants. I surrendered my gun, was stripped of outer clothes and all possessions except my billfold and personal pictures, etc.

John and I were together, but really scared when two peasant women came up to us, blessed themselves and started to cry. I thought we'd get it there and then, but they put us in a wagon and took us to the Zone H.Q. Collins joined us with an English-speaking Jew refugee. He looked happy as hell. We still didn't know if we were okay or not. The Jew assured us that we were fortunate in landing in Rumania and not six miles away in Bulgaria where they execute airmen or tortured them (so they say).

We were fed a good meal of cheese and brown bread and whole fish, which none of us could eat. I lost my pocketknife and rosary to the peasants. They took us to Călărași in a wagon - 30 kilometers away. It was a long ride over rough road and through a small village where the people would stare at us.

A Rumanian asked us, in English, who we were. We told him, Americans. Turns out, his wife is American who came from town in Connecticut twenty miles from Collins' home. It's a small world.

In the next town the local big shot, who fought under Pershing in 1916, gave us hell for bombing women and children. There we changed wagons and went on to Călărași. I saw my first Jerry, a blacksmith - typical.

At Călărași district headquarters, we ate and were shown to a room with three straw-filled mattresses on the floor. There were two Russian prisoners. One was the captain of a submarine which was wrecked while shelling Constanța, the other was a parachutist. Hell, they had the run of the place. The captain sent one of the guards out for wine and cheese and bread. We drank and ate and finally went to bed, which later proved to be full of lice. Did we scratch.

**June 25, 1944**

We woke at six wondering what was in store for us. We had breakfast and washed and finally said goodbye to our Russian friends. In a wagon, we were taken to an army camp for interrogation. We waited from 10 to 12 without saying anything to anybody. They'd come in, look us over, scare the hell out of us, and leave. My little knowledge in German helped a lot. I could make out most of what they said but could always play dumb.

Next, about ten young Rumanian lieutenants came in to look at us. One wise guy who I spoke German with said that we should get 'kaput'. We were then taken into an office where we were searched again. Some things were confiscated, and two Luftwaffe officers came in to hear us and to try to discover where we came from.

Then we were taken to another building and to the Rumanian colonel's office. The two Jerry officers were there and spoke through a Rumanian lieutenant interpreter. *Where were we from?* This was the 64-dollar question. John and Collins were taken

from the room, leaving me alone with them. They told me that I must answer their questions as a murderer of women and children, not a soldier. I figured that I was worth more alive so long as I had information they wanted. I kept them from learning certain facts.

Finally, the interpreter said, "Even though you are a murderer, the Rumanian would treat you as a civilized person." The Germans were typical. One was a fanatical Nazi. The other was expressionless but seemed like a real soldier, every inch. The Prussian!

This over, we waited another few hours then a small Rumanian sergeant major told us to follow him. We went to railroad station where there were four guards with chutes and other stuff. We waited at the station but caused a bit of a commotion, so we were moved to a bar where we again became the main attraction. It's funny, but we always managed to soften them up. Even the most bitter of them, of course admiring the children and nodding hello to everyone helped.

At 6 PM we left for Bucharest. Enroute, we stopped at a town and spoke with a Rumanian who understood a little English. We had some cheese and bread and tea in a Red Cross station along with some Jerrys. We reached Bucharest at 11 PM. We stayed in the waiting room, spoke with some civilians through my feeble German and some sign language. We slept in the station that night. We noticed a Rumanian civilian with his wife trying to sleep. The thought came that they could be us or any American couple.

**June 26, 1944**

Woke about 5:30 and left the station. Got on a streetcar and rode all over town, back tracking, so we wouldn't know where we were going or how to get anywhere. Finally got off and walked



about four or five blocks to a large building which later proved to be "The School<sup>7</sup>", one of three places for POWs in Bucharest.

Here, our chutes, money, and clothes were permanently taken from us. We received a receipt for our money. Here we see other American POWs for the first time.

We took a shower, which felt good. Two American lieutenants brought us coffee (ersatz) for which they caught verbal hell. After our shower, two guards walked us all over town, again backtracking. We finally came to an Army Post where they say that close to a thousand Yanks are held prisoner. I don't doubt it.

Here we ate and were taken to our assigned room, which is a large one. All the fellows here are from the same raid from the day before. We had our last meal at 9 PM and retired to our beds, which were wooden planks! Surprising how well one can sleep.

### **June 27, 1944**

Woke early and found that "breakfast" would be served at 9PM or so. We are told that we are here temporarily until after we've been *officially interrogated*.

Funny what Americans do to keep busy - roll a pair of socks into a ball and play catch - make a checkerboard and checkers with a pencil and any paper. There is a "cantina" across the street. Of course, all of the fellows are selling watches and rings and with that money they buy toothbrushes and powder, cigarettes, candy, and sandwiches. They sold beer today also.

We discovered, to our surprise, this morning that Knuckles, our tail-gunner, is here. He says two more chutes came out after him. I'm afraid they landed in Bulgaria. That's four safe, two down, and four to go! Tanem came in today. He, John, and I are

<sup>7</sup> St. Katherine's is about a mile from the marshalling yards in Bucharest.

here! From Clovis<sup>8</sup> to Bucharest! Tanem<sup>9</sup> managed to keep his money. He gave me five dollars and John got fifteen. One dollar on the black market brings 800 leu but the cantina will only give 500, so we are okay for money for a while.

We need guards wherever we go, but they are pretty nice about everything. We kid the hell out of them. Scare them with talk of the Russians or the "Avian"<sup>10</sup>. The food isn't good, but here with an appetite, we eat it and like it!

### **June 28, 1944**

This morning everyone had two shots for diphtheria, purely voluntary. There are about sixty of us from the raid now. This morning our planes hit the marshalling yards here in Bucharest. One bomb fell about a hundred feet away. Believe me, it's no fun on the ground either.

This dark bread isn't so bad. We eat it like cookies or cake. This morning we started saving cigarette butts, or rather the tobacco. About five butts and you can roll one cigarette. This is conservation plus the cantina gets a big play. We sure run these guards ragged with cantina, chow, wash, and 'piseh kall'. The poor guys have to take us every place.

We ate supper at 9PM and went to sleep around 2 AM. We were woke by the air raid siren. Everyone could be found under a bed. I found a spot under an open window, against the wall. It was a raid by the English against an oil depot, but not in Bucharest. A guard fired a shot into the ceiling when a fellow lit a cigarette. It scared the hell out of us. The rifles, 1916 vintage, have a bark as loud as a bomb.

<sup>8</sup> Clovis, California. Airmen training prior to heading to Europe.

<sup>9</sup> Sgt. Vernon P. Tanem, part of the 720<sup>th</sup> Squadron, not Bob's squad.

<sup>10</sup> This may be a reference to Mutsuhiro Watanabe. Nicknamed "the Bird" (Avian) by his prisoners. He served in a number of military internment camps and was known for his sadism. Although, I am not sure how bringing this guy up would help Bob or his fellow prisoners.

**June 29, 1944**

This morning, "Doc" checked our shots for reaction. Mine sticks out a little bit. Today we were supposed to be paid, but as the Rumanian say, "Una moment" which means any time from a day to a month. Today I saw four boys from Langley Field<sup>11</sup> who I heard went down about a month ago. Glad to see them all okay. It sure looks like the whole damn 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force is over here.

Today we heard from Rumanian sergeant major that Finland is ready to crack and the Russians are driving through Poland and the Yanks are 65 miles from Paris. I hope they hurry up. Home by Christmas, with the help of God.

**June 30, 1944**

Today was as usual, but I managed to get a shower out of the guard. The cold water sure felt good. Washed my shirt today, got it pretty clean. This is important, keeping clean.

The guards today seem happy about something. You know, these Rumanians are very simple people. They like Americans, but they have the Russians working in the Mess. Man, those boys are hard and they don't know what tired means. As an English-speaking Rumanian captain said, *"This is a small country, not like America, where everything is in a hurry, there is much time."*

Most of these guards are 35 or 40 with families of five kids<sup>12</sup>. They are enthusiastic about all. It's now twilight and some of the boys are playing checkers, others play cards that they made with scraps of paper. Outside the guards are shooting the bull. A few of the guys are harmonizing some of the old tunes. Sounds good.

<sup>11</sup> In Virginia.

<sup>12</sup> Bob was 21 when he wrote this. At 21, being 35 or 40 seems like a lifetime away. By the time he turned 40, Bob had nine children and Baby Joe may have been on the way. Joe was born in 1963.

This is a wonderful time of day, just before the sun goes down things are pretty quiet. I think of the many nights at home like this. A quick ride around town, or just sitting with you and the folks, maybe a bottle of beer and the radio, but mostly it's just home I think of, and all it means...

Supper was at 8:30 and Collins, John, and I gabbed about the first time we kissed a girl, just some conversation, then to bed. The planks are getting softer.

### **July 1, 1944**

This morning they moved all the officers except ten. They were interrogated and moved to the "school". Capt. Robinson is in charge of us now, that is he's our official go-between. Today we heard that Finland fell to the Russians, the Russians have gained much of Poland, and the Yanks are close to Paris. All news seems good, but I take it with a grain of salt and pray that it won't be long until I am once more home with you, dear.

This is just boring<sup>13</sup>. We pass the time daydreaming, arguing, playing checkers, and shooting the bull.

A Rumanian captain came in today. He has a new post here and from what he says, we may expect a pretty good deal.

<sup>13</sup> A week earlier, he jumped from a plane that was on fire. Anything is boring after that. And boring seems a whole lot better than "painful."





Bob and Jean, Summer of 1943. Look at the ring on Bob's left hand. That's the ring his mother gave him and the one he pawns while a POW. (Photo from Curran family collection.)

**July 2, 1944**

Today we were supposed to be paid. I doubt if we will get any money after they take out for food and cigarettes. We cleaned up the room this morning and we were given a new mattress, but I didn't take one because the straw is full of bugs. We were told that the rooms would be painted and that we would be staying here permanently. The boys who have been interrogated are pretty free to roam around, but we still need a guard.

This afternoon at chow, I read my missal and the Mass should be about the same for all of you at church. Looked at my pictures and forgot for a while the present - thought about you dear, and the folks, and how you will receive the news of MIA. I only pray that you accept is sensibly and go about your everyday routine as normal, until you receive my Red Cross Card.

I just know that you will receive the news before the Fourth since you have a big day planned and that's the way it usually goes<sup>14</sup>. I am now in comparative safety until the end of the European war. Now my prayers are for Chuck<sup>15</sup>, Pat, and Dune - plus the rest of the boys. May the end of the war find us all home as we were before. With the help of God, we will be soon.

Tonight, we gabbed about different things, songs new and old, from babies to undertakers, then you know we talked about all out moms' home remedies to fix anything from a cold to a bump on the head. We agreed that they were all good and wished for roses for all of our moms.

### **July 3, 1944**

Early this morning, 2AM, we were woke by the air raid siren. Boy, they opened up with flak guns all around us. It gets a guy pretty jumpy. I guess they didn't hit Bucharest though. This war is sure no fun for anyone involved. Today, between 11 and 12, our boys hit the marshalling yards here. Flak guns could be heard all around and the drove of M.E.s took off. We heard a plane in dive.

Afterwards a guard told us a 38 shot down a 109. These raids sure raise hell with a man's nerves. It's funny, in a way, to see the fellows all crawl out from under the beds when it gets quiet and then to see them dive back again at the first sound of flak guns or bombers. The guards get jumpy and trigger happy during and after a raid.

Today, the whole POW camp went on a food strike. We won't eat this food anymore. This afternoon, the Doc spoke to the Colonel and he said that it would be improved. It's serious.

<sup>14</sup> Jeanne received a telegram on July 8, stating that her husband was MIA.

<sup>15</sup> Bob's brother, and friends also in the service. Uncle Charlie is a name known far and wide in Curran lore. He was 19, in the navy, and on his way to fight when hometown newspapers reported Bob being captured.

They took one of the boys away in an ambulance with ptomaine this morning. Between the food, the problems keeping clean, getting a good night's sleep with the lice and the blasted air raids, I sure will be ready to rest when I get back to the States.

This afternoon, the Rumanian colonel and an American major from the school inspected the place. Now we have a few boys on KP and one used to be a cook. The major sure looked good in pinks, even a pink tie.

There are two colts that run around loose on the garrison. They follow the guys around like pet dogs. I always did like a nice colt.

My watch went haywire this evening. I think it's just dirty, but I guess I'll wait and get it fixed when I get back to Oak Park. I hope it isn't too long 'cause I sure do miss it, but I guess knowing the time here isn't too important.

The fellows all have a saying, "Home by Christmas." Could be. With the prayers of millions and continued faith, perhaps with some help of God, it will be a reality. I pray and hope so.

**July 4, 1944**

The Fourth. How many other happier years I can so easily recall, but I am grateful to be alive for this Fourth. I still have all the promises of the future. I can remember when Lark and Dune and I would (also Hap) go up to Twin Lakes and Geneva. Dad was always good about letting us use the car.

And last year, if I remember, or rather two years ago, we played at Butterfield<sup>16</sup> and Mom, Gin and Jeanne joined the boys for supper. Well *this* Fourth, we had another alert, but the lads were raiding another place, probably Ploiești. One formation came

<sup>16</sup> A country club in Oak Brook, IL. It's still there. Tough course with tight fairways and small greens.

close to Bucharest and the flak guns opened up. They're a bit louder than any firecracker I've heard.

Washed all of my clothes and took a shower this afternoon. We received a pack of 'Nationola' today. Funny the things we end up talking about. This evening, I related the whole story of our wedding itself, even you dropping the beads at the alter rail. It sure is fun recalling the wonderful times we had together, dear.

Tonight a guard let off a shot and you should have seen the boys hit the floor right out of a deep sleep. I was found myself on the floor next to the rest of the boys.

**July 5, 1944**

We were woke this morning and told that we would move to hospital, which is closer to the marshalling yards...one of the few targets in Bucharest. We got our worldly possessions packed in an oversized napkin. For John, Collins, and myself includes: a razor, toothpaste and brushes, a small mirror, a few blades, cigarettes, a comb, and soap.

The rest of the officers were interrogated this morning and are also being moved to the school. Rumor has it that we will move in a week or two, to a new camp that is being built for us some place in the country. This rates near the top of my prayers list. At the top is still the end of the war and returning to you and home.

Today I wrote my third Red Cross post card. I only hope that these get to you. This evening, we managed to acquire wooden sandals. I cut one inch off each shoe to make straps for the clocts.<sup>17</sup> The GI shoes feel more comfortable now too and the sandals stay on my feet. Another day closer to being with you.

<sup>17</sup> I'm not sure if this is a typo from the original transcription, a poor attempt at a Romanian term for shoes, or something else.



**July 6, 1944**

This morning, we were all given blankets and sheets and the Russian barber and one of our American boys cut hair and shaved the fellows here in our room. Not too good.

I read a new book today, entitled *Sea Kings and Naval Heroes* by John S. Edgar<sup>18</sup>. Not too good. The day passes as usual with running between the cantina, washroom, lavatory, and chow. Tonight, we talked about Chicago. Collins went to radio school at The Stevens Hotel, so we gabbed about all the places, shows, and Buckingham Fountain, Solders Field and the planetarium. We really covered all of the subjects. And so, to sleep, as the song goes. Maybe to dream of better things and times.<sup>19</sup>

**July 7, 1944**

This morning we woke to find a mess of Rumanian soldiers bringing their stuff in. They are back from the front and here to rest up. It's plain to see that the Rumanian army, or the best part of it, is actually doing the fighting. These boys look intelligent and almost look like Americans.

We were told, this afternoon, to get ready to move to the hospital. Finally, they got us all lined up and they marched us through the streets. We were certainly the center of attention. Some people would smile and nod to us, others would shake their fists. I'd hate to think of them having their way with us. From what I've seen of Bucharest, it hasn't been hit too badly. We got to the hospital in the evening, ate, and returned to our "dormitory" - no bed tonight. Believe me, I will welcome and appreciate a good bed.

<sup>18</sup> All book titles and authors are identified and corrected / completed as much as possible. Some do not match what Bob originally wrote. Hey man, if I ever get published, I'd want people to reference it and me correctly. Such changes to the original diary do not, in any way, change Bob's voice or experience.

<sup>19</sup> I am having no luck finding which song this is referencing.

July 8, 1944

This morning, we were awakened early and taken to the bathhouse 2 where we took hot showers and had our clothes steamed (fumigated). Good idea! This took all morning. There are some boys here now who came down after us. Some of them sure have the wrong slant. I can't understand how they figure they can afford to be tough guys.

After the shower, we returned to the dorm to find beds and mattresses. Sleeping will be a little better tonight, that is, if there is not raid. There is no cantina over here. We were running low on money anyways. The guard told us that there would be no more cigarettes. This isn't too good.

A few of the buildings near the hospital have been hit pretty bad. There's a lot of barbed wire around here, but they give us more room to walk around, so it really is a better place, except that it's too close to the marshalling yard.

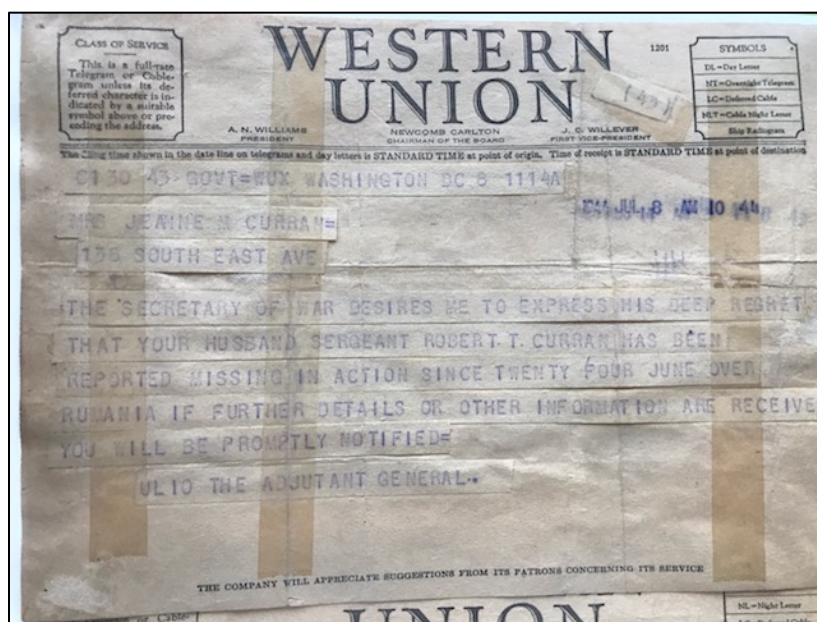


Photo of original telegrams courtesy of Marti McConnell

**July 9, 1944**

This morning, after breakfast, we had an alert which lasted for about an hour and a half. No bombs, no flak, thank God. We heard a plane in a dive and saw a vapor trail afterwards. We saw a dog fight of about ten or so planes. They were really milling around up there.

This afternoon, a whole crowd of the fellows congregated under a couple of trees and with two or three of them leading, they sang hymns. One of the boys talked about the YMCA and the other read a few verses from the Bible. As he explained, we have no priest or minister, so we just get together out here every Sunday. I guess this war has maybe intensified faith in a lot of the boys.

Heard today that the country deal could be off. Hope not. Strong arguments for both sides. Tonight, at 6:00, I read the Mass in my missal. How I'd like to be there with you, going to Mass, then breakfast and an easy Sunday. A day of rest and quiet contentment.

**July 10, 1944**

Today, we moved to a different building, a bit further away from the rest of the boys, until after we're interrogated. There's no water or toilets in this building, but the Russians are building an outhouse. The colonel came around this afternoon and through the English-speaking captain, he wants us to pop to for him. So what? What are we going to do?

There are a few officers with us who have no more sense than numb skulls. They agitate the guards and even laugh at the colonel. This isn't good for us. They are typically pretty good about food, but ours, usually, isn't hot by the time we get it.

The Russians are supposed to be here by the 30<sup>th</sup>, but rumors. Ugh. They brought in three injured Americans from the raid the other day.

**Telegram 1 Transcription:**

C1 30 43 govt wux Washington DC 6 1114 A

Mrs. Jeanne M. Curran  
138 South East Ave

1944 Jul 8 AM 10:44

The Secretary of War desires me to express his deep regret  
That your husband Sergeant Robert T. Curran has been  
Reported missing in action since twenty four June over  
Rumania if further details or other information are received  
You will be promptly notified

Ulio the adjutant general

**July 11, 1944**

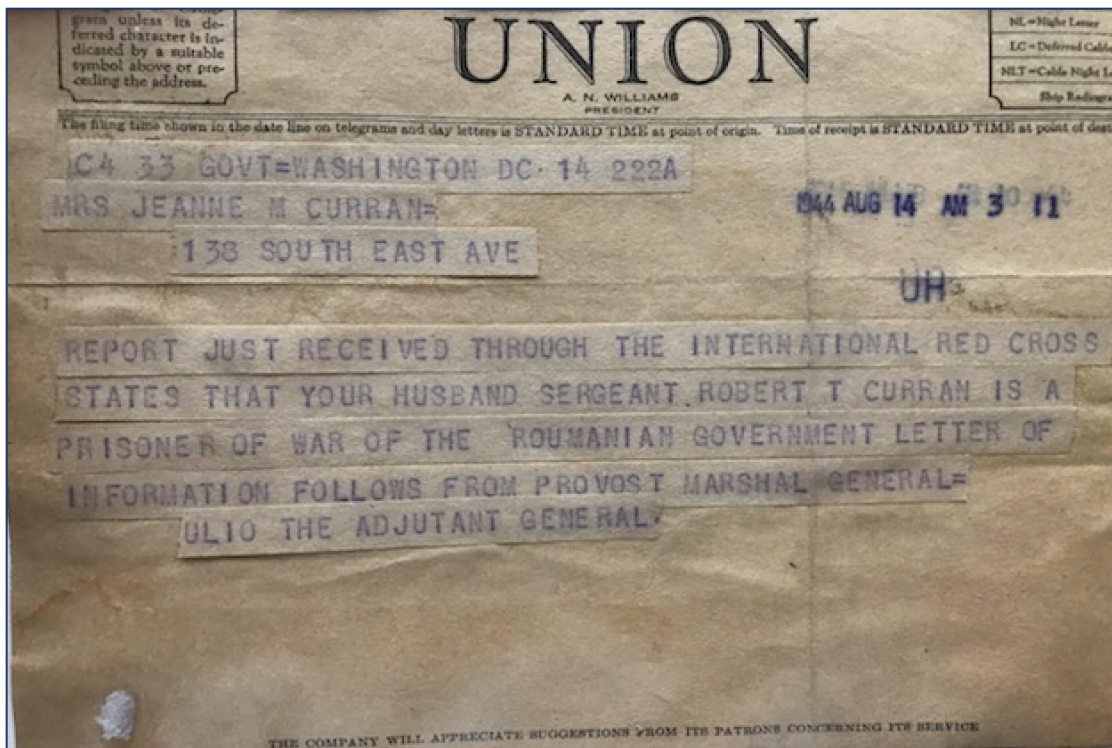
This morning I read a book, *White Face*, by Edgar Wallace. It's a mystery novel. Not bad. We started playing a game called Battleship. It helps to pass the time and it is interesting. We played the darned thing practically all day long.

This afternoon most of the fellows were interrogated and moved back to the old building. The Rumanian captain who interrogated us lived at 12<sup>th</sup> and Sangamon<sup>20</sup> in 1923. Just goes to show you. I really believe that these people are partial to the U.S.

Tonight, the guards were really jumpy. Shooting those damn guns off every few minutes. Sure doesn't help a guy's nerves.

<sup>20</sup> An intersection just west on I-90 in Chicago, near Little Italy. There's a Cold Stone creamery near this intersection in 2023.





**July 12, 1944**

This morning we were interrogated by the captain who lived in Chicago in '23. We moved back to the original building near the hospital. For lunch, we had fresh bread, decent soup, and clean potatoes. Not bad at all. Hope keeps it up. There are rumors going around that there will be real improvements made if we cooperate. Collins was bay chief, so he'll keep us informed of the latest.

Started reading a book called *Death in the Clouds*, another mystery. Took a shower this afternoon. Feels really good. Shaved too. My goatee is becoming faintly noticeable. Can't decide whether or not to keep it until after I see you all or get a shave before dropping in.

**Telegram 2 Transcription:**

C4 33 Govt Washington DC 14 22A

1944 Aug 14 AM 3:11

Mrs. Jeanne M Curran  
138 South East Ave

Report just received through the international Red Cross states that your husband Sergeant Robert T. Curran is a prisoner of war of the Roumanian Government letter of information follows from the provost marshal general

Ulio the adjutant general

**July 13, 1944**

Finished *Death in the Clouds*, but the book was missing pages here and there. This place is beginning to get organized with committees for damn near everything. We have acting sergeants for mess, library, duty, supply, etc., but there isn't a job like the regular U.S. Army.

I wrote a card to you today. I have no idea how long it takes to reach you. I pray that I may beat those cards home. Optimist? Maybe. Last night and every night, it sounded like a shooting gallery here with the guards popping off every few minutes. Sure makes me jumpy.

The rumors are really flying around. Tito is supposed to meet the Russians by July 31<sup>st</sup>. The 15<sup>th</sup> is supposed to be moved, I hope so, to India. They say leaflets were dropped telling the Jerrys to clear out of Rumania. The Jerrys say that they are clearing out.

As I look out the window, I see an old dog with four small, white pups. They sure are cute. Wagging their tails to beat the devil. They say we will have a priest and a minister for next Sunday. Good deal.

The boys intend to screw up the rangers this evening. Personally, I don't go for it. I figure they're on the business end of a cannon and we're in no position to challenge their authority, as long as they don't imperil my chances of returning safely to all of you. I feel I owe a lot of thanks to these Rumanians. They're okay for my money.

**July 14, 1944**

Today is the day the Russians are supposed to be starting their drive through Rumania. Time will tell.

Today, I took a book out of our library, *In Old Rumania*. I thought maybe I could find an understanding of these people. I did, but very little. I guess there is no denying they really are backward and ignorant, but they are good.

We received our cigarette rations. Only ten. Yesterday, we heard the Russians were 60 miles from Germany. These rumors.

**July 15, 1944**

Today I was on KP. I peeled potatoes for an hour and a half. Let it be said here and now, the potatoes here are terrible. Darn near every one is rotten. This was interrupted by an air raid alert.

We could see the bombers up there, just tiny specks. They didn't hit Bucharest, thank God. Rumor is Rumania will be out of the war in a few weeks. Boy what rumors. They say that we all have Red Cross clothes on the way over from the school. I hope the officers leave us something. There is a fighter field close by and the planes take off over us. They sound different.

**July 16, 1944**

Today the rumor is that the war will end in two weeks. The Russians are close to Berlin and 'Joe' says he'll be there in hours. These rumors came by way of a lieutenant knocked down yesterday and also a Rumanian sergeant who heard something on the radio. I pray they are right. We had a fairly good meal for lunch today. The bread was fresh, the potatoes clean and mashed, and the soup had noodles. Pretty good.

The priest didn't come today so I read my missal about the time you all might be a 12:00 Mass. This evening, the boys got together outside and had a community sing. Very impressive. Even the hospital cases joined in. Some spirit we have.

**July 17, 1944**

Today we heard that the Russians crossed the Vistula River and are definitely closing in on Germany. The Rumanians are treating us better and something seems to be in the air. Our food should get better because some of the money the officers donated towards our food.

Russians are ten miles from the German border, we also hear by way of rumor that they rest up in Rumania before the 31<sup>st</sup> before their drive through south central Europe. Rumors abound, but these ones sound good. Tonight, we heard that we have a colonel, possibly Colonel Mills of our old outfit. They say he's pretty badly burned. This afternoon we got restocked with soap, etc.

**July 18, 1944**

This morning we were inspected by a full bird colonel. I took a hot shower then washed my shirt, shorts, and socks and shaved. Looked at all of my pictures of you, dear and Mari Jo and 1400. What a happy day when once more I am there with you

and everyone at home. I pray that you are all well and that Mom or you or anyone took the news about me without any ill effects to your health or spirits.

I'm getting pretty fair at rolling cigarettes, but mine don't come up to Old Golds. There's 23 new boys waiting to be interrogated, including the Colonel. A sentinel told us that if they get the General<sup>21</sup>, the war will be over. Simple people.

Every night after lights out, we shoot the bull for about an hour or more about anything and everything.

### **July 19, 1944**

Today was more-or-less uneventful and typical. I washed my pants and played catch for a while. Rumor has it there are nine thousand Red Cross packages enroute here. Hope they get here soon. All the fellows talk about what food they will have first, and all the things they want to do, when they get back to the States. I have my ideas too.

Heard tonight that the Russians have thirteen divisions inside East Prussia. We were inspected again by the Colonel and a new person, a lady from The Blue Cross. They seem to be taking an exceptional interest in our welfare. Maybe the war will be over with soon. With the help of God, it could be any day now. I pray constantly that it will end and that I'll be with you again.

### **July 20, 1944**

This morning we had two hard boiled eggs for breakfast. For lunch two apricots with the usual soup. This evening the Blue Cross lady smuggled us in eight cigarettes and one piece of

<sup>21</sup> Maybe, Erick-Oskar Hansen. In 1943, he commanded the German Military Mission in Romania in addition to being Military Commander, Romania. He surrendered to the Russians in August 1944 which tracks with this account.

candy apiece. This evening a fellow came back from a Russian concentration camp. He told us of the underground they have for receiving news an hour after it happens. He confirmed all of the rumors we've been hearing, more or less, about Turkey and Tito, and Finland. His belief is that this is between Finland and The Balkans as to which will capitulate first. All rumors are good and they explain the sudden interest in us from the Rumanians.

My prayers are constantly that it will soon end and I can return to all of you. There certainly is something in the air.

**July 21, 1944**

Today we heard that the radio tells of an attempt by Germans to assassinate Hitler<sup>22</sup> and that there is a revolutionary government in power in Berlin on the platform of peace. Colonel Block<sup>23</sup> is supposed to be the head of it.

This morning we had marmalade for breakfast and milk included with lunch. Rare luxuries. Things are picking up. If only fifty percent of these rumors are true, that'd be worth something. Things look promising anyway. This evening we saw tanks moving out from across the street. About seven of them. Things are happening.

I pray it may end soon and to be with you again, my dear. Time passes slow and then fast. Nights are best, for then I sleep and dream of you.

**July 22, 1944**

This morning we had an alert that lasted for three hours. Several times the flak-guns opened up and we hit the "adapost"<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> A day earlier, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg planned to kill Hitler by detonating an explosive hidden in a briefcase. It only slightly injured him.

<sup>23</sup> Colonel General Ludwig Beck

<sup>24</sup> Adăposturi, Romanian for 'shelter'

They brought in five new prisoners from today's raid. These raids are "neve bune"<sup>25</sup>. We had pork for lunch today from the sow they killed yesterday. We heard that southern France was invaded.

Hitler made a speech. He said that he had only a few days to live and that everything now rests with Wehrmacht, since he lost power over the weakening Luftwaffe and Navy. The Russians are supposed to be advancing thirty miles a day through East Prussia. Tonight we bought cream puffs from the Rumanian sergeant. Darn good eating.

### **July 23, 1944**

Today I heard that Johnny Diviney is supposed to be here. As yet, I haven't seen him. Also, Hitler is supposed to have been dead for two days<sup>26</sup> and the new German recruits are refusing to go to the front. Good news, so we made a five-dollar pool on the date hostilities would officially cease. Closest to the date gets the whole pot. No priest came this evening so I read from my missal about the same time you all would have been at 12:00 Mass.

### **July 24, 1944**

Today we've been downed in Rumania for one month. The time seems to have gone quickly enough. Early this morning, we had a raid by the ....<sup>27</sup>

Lots of flak and the drones of planes. You see them caught in the lights and tracers pouring up at them. These raids are no good for my nerves, but with the help of God we'll see them through to the end of the war. They dropped pamphlets to the

<sup>25</sup> Nu e bine, Romanian for 'no good'

<sup>26</sup> Hitler was not dead at this time.

<sup>27</sup> Incomplete sentence during the transcription from original diary to first typed edition.

Rumanians telling them to get out. Tonight we received real cigarettes from the Blue Cross lady with the compliments of General Ionescu. Could indicate something.

### July 25, 1944

Today, the rumor is that people in town are talking about peace and the Germans are supposed to be pulling out. Also, Turkey is supposed to be joining the Allies within the week. This news came through a lieutenant down from....<sup>28</sup>

Today you will probably light two candles in St. Edmunds. Yes dear, I still say our prayer to St. Martha<sup>29</sup> every day before the sun goes down. It really is nice at that time of day. It cools off and a slight breeze picks up and it gets quiet. Even the boys seem to talk more softly then. Then to sleep, until the raid siren wakes us, and to pray for better days when this is over and I'm with you once again.

### July 26, 1944

This morning we took a shower and were told that we were to be inspected by The Minister of War. This was interrupted by a raid which lasted for over an hour. A little later the siren and the bells and a few horns sounded. It was strange to have a second raid on the same night. With the bells sounding, some of us thought that the war was over. It wasn't.

We heard that we might get Red Cross packages soon. A few fellows got letters and the Limey's all got packages. Same old story after lights out. A raid at 1:30 AM. I watched the search lights go up and the tracers firing up at the bombers. What a

<sup>28</sup> Incomplete sentence during the transcription from original diary to first typed edition.

<sup>29</sup> St. Martha Novena, in part: *Comfort me in all my difficulties and through the great favors thou didst enjoy when the Savior was lodged in thy house, intercede for my family, that we be provided for in our necessities. I ask of thee, Saint Martha, to overcome all difficulties as thou didst overcome the dragon which thou hadst at thy feet.*



fireworks display, but this one is deadly and, believe me, no fun.

### **July 27, 1944**

Today, I gave my ring<sup>30</sup> to Smith to sell. I hated to do it but I figured on wearing a wedding band when I get home<sup>31</sup>. Today passed as usual and the night raid came at 11 PM. It lasted for two hours and I've never been so afraid of anything in all my life. I was shaking, and not with patriotism. A few bombs landed fairly close. Close enough to hear them whistling down. It was bad with the bombs and the ack-ack guns and the planes winding up. I surely thank God for without His help, it could have easily been a different story.

### **July 28, 1944**

This morning we had another alert - boy, this is no good. Afterwards, the Minister of War came and inspected the place. He told us we would definitely be moved to a new camp and, in general, we can expect improvements. I washed all of my clothes and took a sponge bath this afternoon.

A year ago we were together at Stamford. I washed out and started for Bucharest via Shepherd, Harlingen, Clovis, Langley, and Italy. Today a Rumanian priest visited us. We enjoyed him very much.

<sup>30</sup> Bob's Air Force ring. This was gift to him from his mother, given to him the day after his wedding.

<sup>31</sup> Bob and Jean were married 2/24/42. I'm not sure why he wasn't wearing his wedding ring at that time. Maybe he did not want to lose it or have it taken from him?



Bob and Jean, a year earlier. Curran Family Archives

**July 29, 1944**

A lot of Rumanian big shots here this morning. I got 5500 leu for my ring today and bought cigarettes and cakes. Played hearts part of the day. Heard from a 38 pilot that FDR promised in his last speech that the boys would be home for Christmas. If true, I hope it turns out.

I heard today that The Geneva Conference states something about an ex-POW getting a discharge or placed on an inactive list upon return to the USA. Boy! I hope there's something to that! Maybe I'll be home to help trim the Christmas tree.

**July 30, 1944**

This morning the big shots came again and we were informed that the old, fat colonel is to be replaced by a new boy. They also tell us that we will be moved to the new camp. Played cards for a while today. Read my missal and the Mass at about the time you would be going to Mass at St. Edmund's or St Vincent's. I was kneeling next to you, in spirit anyways.

Ah, we are eating different bread. It's much better. A few days ago, the Minister of War told us that we shouldn't try to escape since the war is almost over. Yes, these people seem to really be partial to us. But they use discretion.

**July 31, 1944**

This morning John sold his ring. We're getting down to our last personal items now. Between about 11 and 1 we had an air raid. I stayed in the shelter during most of it. Even underground, the scream of bombs and report of the guns could be heard. Even the planes. Believe me, it's a hell of a thing that drives men underground like rats, and an even worse thing that causes men to shake and shiver in their boots.

I am thankful that I'm Catholic. I pray a lot and it helps. I am thankful for my faith. This afternoon a priest came and said Mass. It was quite an impressive ceremony. This evening I listened to Rumanian, the Russian, then our own boys singing their favorite songs.

**August 1, 1944**

This morning we played cards. It rained and I spoke with John Diviney. He seemed okay. I was glad to see him. Heard today that Turkey and Bulgaria are on the verge of getting in with the Allies and that Bulgaria ordered German troops to evacuate. That's some rumor.

This evening they started moving all of the wounded men to the hospital. Johnny says that they are going to move us soon and that these buildings will be cleared out. I hope so. Today I started reading a good book, *Jock, Jack and the Corporal*, by CC Martindale.

### **August 2, 1944**

This morning we had two hard boiled eggs and we took hot showers which really makes a guy feel better. We hear that Rommel's supposed to have been killed in a bombing<sup>32</sup>, but there's always a rumor.

Today passed more-or-less as usual. Finished reading Martindale. It would be a good book for Religion classes in high school. This afternoon we saw Red Cross volunteer drivers giving us the victory sign, strictly on the QT. This evening we were given 150 cigarettes. Back payment for all the past ones we've missed.

### **August 3, 1944**

This morning we heard that Turkey declared war, but that the Germans have occupied The Dardanelles<sup>33</sup>. If part of this is true, it seems to be good news for us. There certainly seems to be a lot in the air.

We had milk at lunch, quite the treat. This evening some Red Cross clothes arrived, but it won't be distributed for a while. We bought a jar of marmalade. It goes good during the day and takes the edge off of an ever-present appetite.

<sup>32</sup>German General J Erwin Rommel survived the war and died at his home on October 14, 1944, via cyanide capsule induced suicide.

<sup>33</sup> A narrow, natural strait and internationally significant waterway in northwestern Turkey that forms part of the boundary between Asia and Europe. Through February 1945, when Turkey was neutral for most of the war, the Dardanelles were closed to the ships of the belligerent (Axis) nations. Turkey declared war on Germany in February 1945, but it did not employ any offensive forces during the war.

They've built a basketball court which affords a pleasurable pastime. We also have a bulletin board now. I constantly think of you, darling, and of home, and I pray that we will be together again soon.

#### **August 4, 1944**

This morning we had an alert that lasted for little more than an hour. No flak, no bombs. We later heard that it was a fighter alert. Also heard from the English internees that Jerry is evacuating France. What's wrong with Rumania?

It sure is good to see the labels on the Red Cross boxes. Philadelphia, New Jersey, etc. The fellows all congregated outside tonight and sang songs. There's one lad who has a really wonderful tenor voice. Today I started reading the book *Donne*, by Evelyn Hardy

#### **August 5, 1944**

This morning the French woman, The Madame<sup>34</sup>, and the Colonels were here so we lined up for them. They made some straw mattresses for the rest of the boys. An English-speaking priest visited. I went to confession, as did nearly every Catholic here. They passed out the Red Cross clothes. What a sight to see one of the boys dressed out in class A's from shoes to ties. After seeing him in wooden ones, not bad. A guard brought us a bag of plums. We tried to give him 100 leu but he wouldn't take it. There's a beautiful moon up now shining white and lighting the place up like day.

<sup>34</sup> Boteanu. Per Cubbins, the Madame was with the Red Cross. She was also known as "The Princess". Madame Boteanu was the daughter of well-respected WWI general. She aided Catherine Caradja in getting aid to American POW. She was known to Bob for being a candy man, but a woman and with cigarettes instead of sweets. (Cubbins, 1989)

## **August 6, 1944**

This morning we took hot showers and we heard that the Germans have three divisions in Constanța<sup>35</sup>. That could point to action there since American troops now occupy The Dardanelles. We had an alert that which lasted a little over an hour. Fighter alert. A priest was supposed to come, but if he did, there wasn't a Mass, though I thought there would be. Tonight we had a community sing. Not bad.

## **August 7, 1944**

This morning our new beds were fixed. Not bad at all. Last night, I had a dream about you. To be truthful, it wasn't good. We had the shortest alert yet, twenty minutes. I got a new shirt, new socks, shorts, wool undershirt, soap, dental powder, and shaving soap from the Red Cross. One of the boys got three letters dated from June 17<sup>th</sup>. Pretty good. We exchanged beds with the boys from the big dorm.

The priest came and we had Mass. I received Communion, as did most of the boys. Tonight rumors of peace are going around town. The Germans are using all of the railways to evacuate from Rumania. Just rumors, but I hope and pray that it will end soon.

<sup>35</sup> Far western Romanian city that harbors into The Black Sea. It is 142 miles due west of Bucharest.



Curran Family Archives

**August 8, 1944**

Is today Dad's birthday or tomorrow?<sup>36</sup> This morning we saw quite a few soldiers change into civies going home either on furlough or for good. I now believe the rumors.

We had another alert which lasted more than an hour. We heard only a little flak. Boy these raids and alerts are bad. They have me so jumpy. Today, Colonel Smith and some other officers came over. Also a Captain from...<sup>37</sup>who is going to stay here with us. The Colonel blew all of our rumors sky high!

Tonight we had another song fest. Not bad. Played casino for a while today. We gambled for pretty high stakes, two cigarettes. I think I'm ahead of the game.

<sup>36</sup> Roy E. Curran, Sr. 1892-1948. He turned 52 that August 8<sup>th</sup>, while his middle son was a prisoner half a world away. He would live to see his sons return from war, but not much longer. He died of a heart attack on a plane enroute to Texas during a business trip. Roy Sr. dying on a plane during peacetime and his son surviving a jump from a plane during a war is proof something akin to Karma.

<sup>37</sup> Incomplete sentence during the transcription from original diary to first typed edition.

**August 9, 1944**

This morning woke as usual and had marmalade, bread, and tea for breakfast. Read *The Story of Marie Powell: Wife to Mr. Milton* by Robert Graves. A good book! Some points in it worth mentioning to you, Dear. You'd get a kick out of it.

We heard today that we would move to a new camp in three weeks. Still playing casino for cigarettes. The Blue Cross Lady brought us more cigarettes today, ten apiece. Tonight the Limey's came over and we used the adapost for the first time at night. These raids are no good. I pray constantly that it may end soon and I may once more be with you, Dear.

**August 10, 1944**

Today is the day I've picked<sup>38</sup>. This morning we had a three-hour alert. The boys hit Ploiesti, I guess with the whole 15<sup>th</sup>. We saw one ship blow up midair. Pamphlets were dropped last night giving Rumania twelve hours to sign over. This afternoon, the smoke from Ploiesti, 40 miles away, blackens the sky over Bucharest. War!

One of the boys goy a letter from home written in July. We bought cantaloupes from a guard for 200 leu. Not worth it. The boys sell cakes for 60 leu. I'd like to know their profit margins.

The pamphlets were translated, and they said that 'the Jerrys can't stop us from destroying Rumanian soil and lives, that they should sign over to us or take the consequences coming from Russia.' I don't know what's going to happen.

<sup>38</sup> Maybe he originally wrote 'packed'. As in he packed his stuff, such as it was, and was ready to move out. 'Picked' doesn't seem like the right word here, not that he had a whole lot to pack.





# Passierschein

Der deutsche Soldat, der diesen Passierschein vorzeigt, benutzt ihn als Zeichen seines ehrlichen Willens, sich zu ergeben. Er ist zu entwaffnen. Er muß gut behandelt werden. Er hat Anspruch auf Verpflegung und, wenn nötig, ärztliche Behandlung. Er wird so bald wie möglich aus der Gefahrenzone entfernt.

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*  
OBERBEFEHLSHABER  
der alliierten Expeditions-Armeen

*Englische Übersetzung nachstehend. Sie dient als Anweisung an die alliierten Vorposten.*

# SAFE CONDUCT

The German soldier who carries this safe conduct is using it as a sign of his genuine wish to give himself up. He is to be disarmed, to be well looked after, to receive food and medical attention as required, and to be removed from the danger zone as soon as possible.

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*  
SUPREME COMMANDER,  
Allied Expeditionary Force

**August 11, 1944**

Today we had no alert and the day passed without anything unusual. Of course we had a rumor that Rumania is seeking peace. Huh! They say we will move in a couple of weeks and Madame tells us that the new camp is very beautiful, like a big garden. I don't know what to think.

The days seem to be slow but the weeks move fast, thank God. I hope the time flies and the day that I will be with all of you will be here soon. It will be good to be with Mom and Dad once more at 1400, and of course, with you.

**August 12, 1944**

Another day passes slowly as usual. Took a cold shower and that actually felt pretty good<sup>39</sup>. We heard the Americans are forty miles from Paris and that Ionescu has resigned his authority over the government to the Rumanian king. Tonight we held a community sing of all of the old ones. Every song held a different, distinct picture on my memory. '*Set the World on Fire*'<sup>40</sup>, especially. Remember Notre Dame and the games and the weekend when you'd come down? So many good memories.

<sup>39</sup> I have an old memory of someone say that Bob took cold showers, almost exclusively, when he got home from the war. Maybe it was due to conditioning from the camp. Maybe, with ten kids, there was no hot water by the time he got to the bathroom.

<sup>40</sup> Possibly the song 'I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire' written in 1938, performed originally by The Ink Spots. Lyrics include: ***I don't want to set the world on fire / I just want to start a flame in your heart / In my heart I have but one desire / And that one is you / No other will do.***

This is just speculation.



**August 13, 1944**

This morning I volunteered for K.P. We peeled onions and cried for about two hours. John Diviney came over and told us that he's going home with the amputee cases. His pelvis is split. I gave him my address and phone number and he promised to write or phone. I hope they make it home without taking any disappointments.

A fellow came in today from our squadron. He told us that the official report says that six chutes got out of our ship. Six. That's what I saw. This guy was a ground man who wanted to see what the camp was like. He came and saw.

**August 14, 1944**

Today I read *Carlyle: Prophet of To-Day* by F.A. Lea. Not so bad. A few Limeys moved into our room today. It's sure hard to understand their lingo. These boys seem okay though. The priest came and performed Mass. I received Communion as did a number of others. No rumors or news today. For supper we had a small piece of watermelon with our usual soup. Sounds good, doesn't it? I'm still saying our prayer to St. Martha. May the war soon be over.

**August 15, 1944**

Today we ate hamburgers which were very good. This morning the missionary priest who will be our regular chaplain, came and said Mass. The old fellow is of royal blood and the last son of the line. He's a character. The Blue Cross Lady and another lady, the wife of a wealthy Rumanian, brought us new books. This is not uncommon, especially amongst the influential. They like us, but must restrain themselves, naturally.

**August 16, 1944**

I read a very good book, *The Little White Nun* by C.N Williamson. I played some basketball this afternoon and established our dormitory team to play in the upcoming tournament. They've also organized a bridge tournament and volleyball also. The food is a bit better now.



August 17, 1944

This morning we played our basketball game, which was interrupted by the siren. They hit Ploiesti again with a hell of a lot of planes. We lost by three baskets, 16-22. I started another book, *Pro Patria* by Max Pemberton. Played some bridge with Dobbs and some English and Canadian boys. Bridge is the popular card game in England and Canada.

The Blue Cross Lady brought us smokes and sure enough, we had an alert. Flak guns opened up. They must have hit some place else. These raids are no joke. A person never gets used to them and each one seems to be getting worse.



B-24 Belly Gunner position.

**August 18, 1944**

We had another raid this morning. The Russians told us that the English, Russian, and American planes combined into one fleet and hit targets all over Rumania. We saw the planes and there was a mess of them.

Played bridge again with the Limeys. There's a rumor that the Rumanians will open the gates in the event that the Germans try to take us with them. Some boys have escaped. I discovered that Ed Schaub is the nephew of Mike Kimmen Schaub.

**Summary as of August 19, 1944** <sup>41</sup>

From the day I jumped I had forebodings of the treatment I would receive until today, when I realized that the treatment is much better than I expected or could have hoped for, I have come to realize that this war is the most asinine thing tolerated by the human race.

Here, in Bucharest, I've lived with Russians, English, and Rumanians, and our own Americans from far and wide and few of them could find a reasonable answer as to why they call each other enemies.

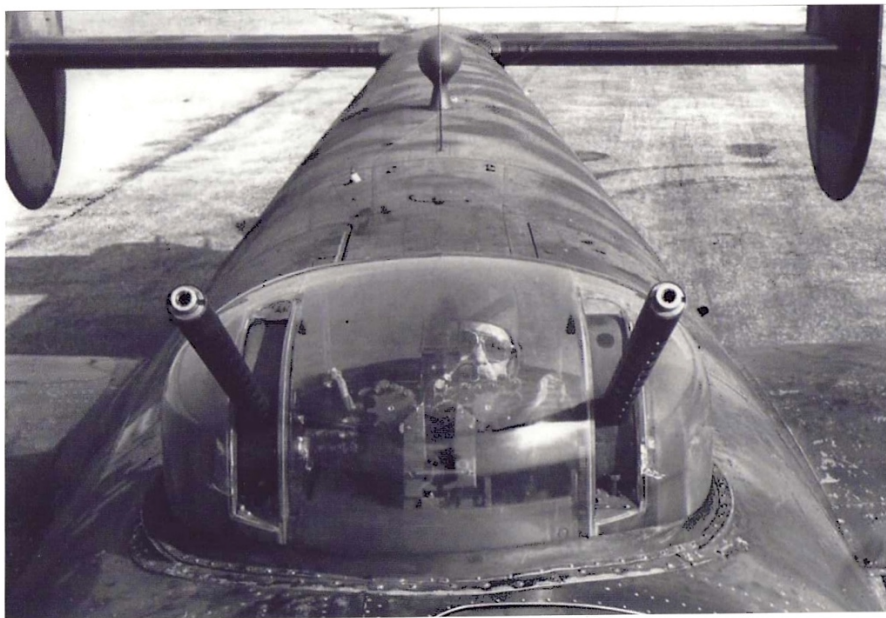
Certainly war itself is a worthy subject of the most profound study, especially the psychology of the people involved. When peace comes, I believe that that study should be advocated, for certainly there is much to be discovered and learned.

But, if in the end, these wars are to be fought because of territorial claims and concrete reasons, then war becomes even more foolish. On the other hand, if, as I believe, the reasons are of a more abstract nature, then war becomes the challenge of

<sup>41</sup> I am unsure if this was written by Bob or Aunt Kathy, or Jean. So many cooks in the kitchen of this diary. Having the original diary would be useful, but that never happened. This section certainly does not have the same style or voice as the previous or following pages so I am skeptical that Bob wrote it.

all learned men. Of course, history, economics, geography, they all have an indirect bearing on the development of war.

But the day when men, the men who actually fire the guns and other implements of war, when they come to the understanding that that war for them holds nothing, absolutely nothing, but misery, hardship, and suffering, both mental and physical, then certainly the day has arrived when these so called enemies will settle their claims and differences with the intelligence God so graciously willed them to develop, rather than fight like animals with the savage ferocity and inhumane tools of destruction. Tools designed for no other reason than a surer and more brutal means of ending the life of another man, an enemy. A man who, like you, possesses the same physical and certainly spiritual faculties as yourself. Those these enemies have different habits of life, the above mentioned faculties may have developed in different channels, these are not reasons worthy of war. If only all men could be made to understand and appreciate each other's feelings and beliefs.



### **August 19, 1944**

I talked with Schaub about John Kimmin, Mamie Mike, Uncle Jim and Aunt Jo and Aunt Stella and Uncle Will. He visited Chicago about ten years ago and had Thanksgiving with us. He's a close friend of Bob Harmon. Tessie Lavin lived with the Schaub on and off. It was sure one for the books, meeting someone like that here in a POW camp in Rumania. And we are related, distantly, by marriage.

This morning we had another alert. They sure are keeping the Rumanians busy. They had a roll call to check if any boys left last night. We got news that we are taking heavy losses in France but have taken a lot of prisoners as well, so...

### **August 20, 1944**

We played another basketball game and really got a kickin' 40-16. No good. The priest was here today hearing confessions. Took a cold shower POW style. Played bridge with the Limeys. They're really good. Dobbs and I usually get beat, but we enjoy playing anyway. It's contract bridge, which takes a lot of thinking.

We set up a finance officer to handle the sale of jewelry and the profits from the cantina. And we had hamburgers today, with tomatoes and a side of mashed potatoes and a side of diner music. Things are really looking up.

### **August 21, 1944**

Today we organized into groups of sixes in case of an emergency presented itself when all of us must take off. I finished a book, *The River of Unrest* by Bertram Mitford. Pretty fair. I also wrote a Red Cross Card today, played bridge with the Brits and watched the searchlights practice tracking



**August 22, 1944**

Getting to be quite a bridge fiend. Played all morning today. Lunch was hamburgers again. That's twice in three days. This afternoon, I smoked an English Players cigarette. Man, that's a smoke. It will take some time to get used to Old Golds again. We have a lot of fun talking with these Limeys. One of them is really funny. He told us when he bailed out. Had us in stitches.

**August 23, 1944**

Today we made a deck of cards, cut them out of cardboard and marked them. They served the purpose. I'm getting much better at rolling cigarettes now. In fact, pretty fair. Played more bridge. Hackney sure did draw some swell face cards<sup>42</sup>.

We went to bed and were woke about 11 PM and told, RUMANIA HAD SIGNED PEACE TERMS AT 10 PM WITH THE RUSSIANS!!!

Of course, the place was in an uproar. We finally settled back to sleep and were awakened again. This time, the Rumanian captain from Chicago interpreted the speech of a colonel who came straight from the general's staff to for the express purpose of "saluting us as allies" and telling us that Rumania is "the first of the Balkan States to swing to the right side." The old sergeant was came in and was crying and kissing everybody and calling us 'kamerads'. We listened to the tanks taking up positions and patrolling until the wee hours. God, how thankful I am for the news tonight!

<sup>42</sup> I'm not sure if Bob means 'drew' in the card-playing sense or 'drew' in the artistic sense, because these cards were homemade.

**August 24, 1944**

Two months ago today, I came to Rumania. This morning there were no guards. We walked all over the hospital area and I read a newspaper and saw pictures of Americans passing under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Everyone is overjoyed at the turn of events. Everyone here, for the first time, is happy. It's difficult to decide who is more glad, we Americans or the Rumanians.

Rumanian planes circled overhead this morning. German flak guns finally opened up on them. There is fighting going on outside of town for an ammunition dump. They say the Germans are strong in Bucharest. I wish we were armed. Today the Germans bombed Bucharest. They dive bombed with 190's and Heinkels. We ran to the big adapost and bombs dropped not even a hundred yards away.

The Rumanian people have accepted us with hopeful and open arms. A couple of days ago, we were prisoners, now we are allies in a war. The all clear sounded and we returned to the dorm and I got my Red Cross parcel. Boy, American cigarettes sure are good. Also chocolate and spam. Soon after the bombers came in without any warning.

We hit the little adapost and bombs dropped in very close to us. One hit dorm 12. Another in the orchard and one hit the maternity hospital. We left the L----- in a slight panic. Bombs still dropping all around. The one that hit dorm 12 was only 20-30 feet away. I could feel the concussion of the blast through my feet on the floorboards. There was a six foot slit trench filled with dust. My God, how we prayed and still are. We entered the big building with all of our parcels and blankets, etc. and stayed the night in the basement.

**August 25, 1944**

What a God-awful nightmare this is. We are in a room with old women, babies, young mothers nursing these innocent kids. It certainly is a pity. As one lad said after seeing this, "I'll never drop another bomb on anyone."

Today, I ran out with a Rumanian into town to get some watermelon. We saw anti-tank guns drawn through the streets by horse. We spent the entire time since yesterday in the basement, except for the occasional smoke break during any lull. God, what an experience this is.

The Germans are bombing the city at random as a reprisal for flipping sides. There is still some street fighting going on around town.

**August 26, 1944**

This morning, after about 48 hours, in this place where there are twenty thousand panic-stricken people, Dobbs, Collins, and I returned to the camp to retrieve clean water and to look around. What we saw struck me speechless. The sight of what was our own sleeping quarters ruined. All the trees stripped bare, the earth gutted with craters, the fence uprooted and hardly discernable, the orchard without a tree left standing, not a leaf intact. The big building across the way is completely demolished, the roof disintegrated.

This place, where a couple of days ago five hundred English and American POWs laughed and joked with Rumanians is now nothing but a picture of deathly quiet. Only dogs and puss-filled wounds still ran about.

We went to mess hall and got a few spoons and forks, found some toilet paper and canned milk and meat. We returned to the adapost and learned that we would be moving today. A bit later, some trucks arrived in an orderly fashion and we boarded them.

When the 15<sup>th</sup> flew over and bombed the out-laying airfields, a cheer went up from everyone. We then drove to the country. The towns we saw along the way were ghostly. Dead horses and dogs, wires and street cars and wreckage strewn about. We arrived at the new camp safely, both officers and EMs but there are still a number unaccounted for. We have wells out here for water which is a good thing.

### **August 27, 1944**

This morning I got up early, mainly because I was so darn cold, having no blanket and sleeping on cement floor. Some of the boys are living out in the fields and staying there at night. We started setting up a kitchen early this morning. I helped carry water and chop and saw wood. It's comparatively safe out here, away from Bucharest.

Fighters flew over but Bucharest wasn't hit today. There are still small bands of Germans running around so we organized a guard squad. I volunteered for it. Today we had American coffee, bread, and jam. There are 2000 packs of cigarettes that we never knew about and also around five hundred Red Cross parcels that the officers had.

There's a rumor that the Colonel has flown to Italy and that we might evacuate Rumania soon. I pray for the day.

## **August 28, 1944**

This morning, I stood guard for three hours with a Rumanian sentinel. Three hours with a Rumanian and you learn to get on with his language and sign language. He told me, best as I could understand, that companies of soldiers were wiped out by German mortar fire. While we were talking, his brother drove by on a motorcycle. They waved at each other. He was so glad to see him, though he was headed to the front lines. This place is getting really...<sup>43</sup>

The food, though only two meals a day, is really okay. We are living mostly from the Red Cross parcels.

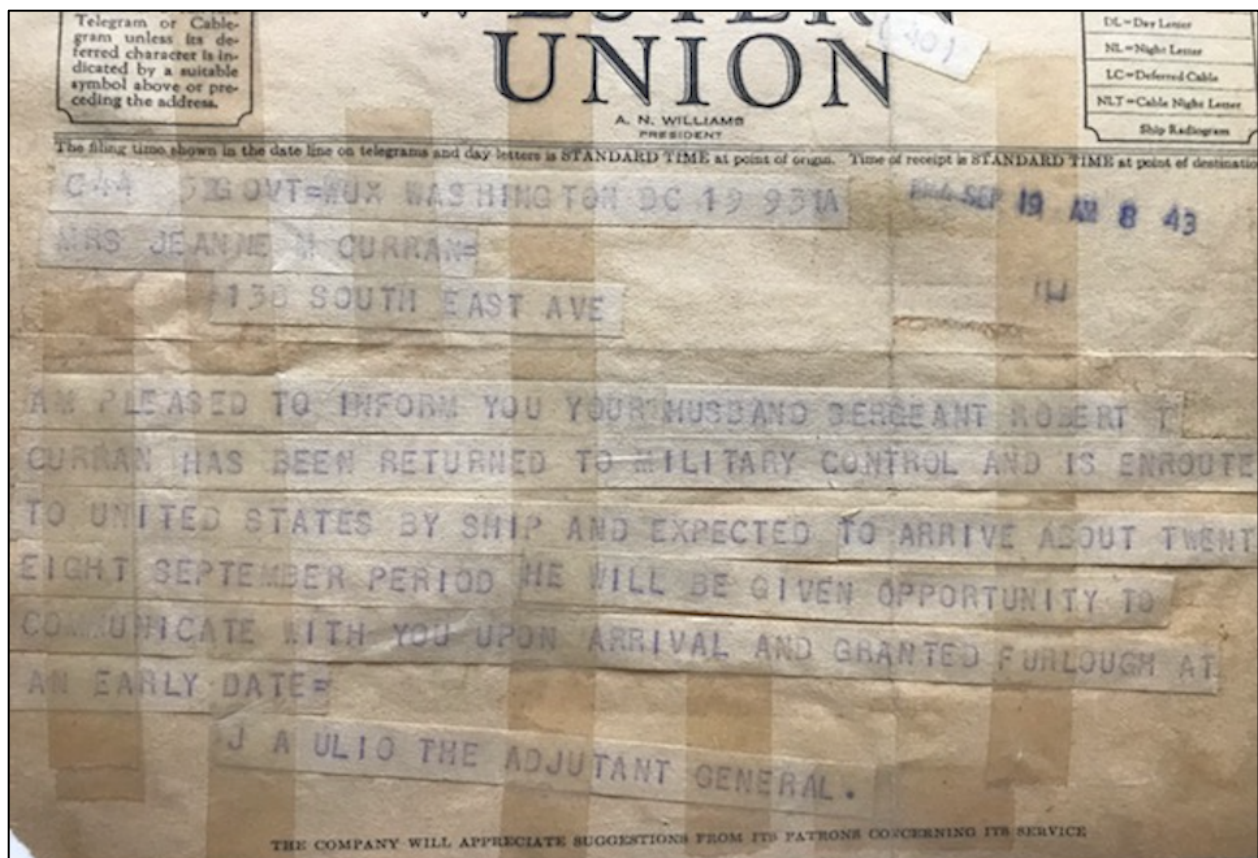
There is much traffic on the highway. Lorries, horse and wagons, bicycles, motorcycles, three-wheeled trucks, everything. All moving. This is a lot of soldiers going 'a casa.' We buy wine and watermelon from the farmers taking their wares to market. The Rumanian fighters fly over low on take offs and landings. When they pass over us, they waggle their wings, which is a nice thing to see.

## **August 29, 1944**

They saw that we still have a bunch of Red Cross mail at the hospital, another rumor. Today I stood guard at the headquarters and came to the conclusion that these officers are not the so-called leaders that they pretend to be.

We heard today that our B-17s have made it this far and that the planes flying around were 51's. We had a good meal this evening. A captain came from town and said that he saw a Russian advance armor car with a young fellow sitting atop with a sub-machine gun, looking unconcerned as hell. Ah, yes! The Ruskis!!

<sup>43</sup> Incomplete sentence during the transcription from original diary to first typed edition.



**August 30, 1944**

This morning we lined up and the Colonel told us that "GOD WILLING AND THE WEATHER PERMITTING, WITH THE HELP OF THE 15<sup>TH</sup> AIR FORCE, WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY HOME TOMORROW!" A cheer went up from everyone and a chill ran down my back. For months, these were the words we've waited to hear. I went over the fence with John, Dibbs, and Squire and visited the small town of Bragadiru. We circled around to the highway and saw caravan chuck full of shells for ack-ack guns and artillery. The town consisted of about five stores and a bunch of little cottages. We bought wine and Nationals and Plugars, a loaf of bread and we drank some 'bire' which was very good.

**Telegram 3 Transcription:**

C44 52Govt wux Washington DC 19 931A

1944 Sep 19 AM 8:43

Mrs. Jeanne M. Curran  
138 South East Ave.

I am pleased to inform you your husband sergeant Robert T. Curran has been returned to military control and is enroute. to the United States by ship and is expected to arrive about twenty eight September period he will be given opportunity to communicate with you upon arrival and granted furlough at an early date.

J A Ulio the adjutant general

END of diary

After Bob was released from Rumania, he flew back to Bari, Italy with the 15<sup>th</sup> in modified B-17s. Bombs were removed and replaced with POW's. B-17's were not pressurized or well-insulated. It had to be a cold and uncomfortable flight, but after more than two months as a POW, I doubt Bob complained. He spent a few weeks recuperating and debriefing.

From there, he returned to the U.S. via ship to New York. When he debarked, he called Jeanne who was staying with her mother-in-law in Oak Park, Illinois. From New York he traveled by rail to Fort Sheridan in Illinois. From there he took a cab the 35 miles to Oak Park where his wife and mother eagerly awaited his safe return. He was home with plenty of time before Christmas.