Philobiblon – Vol. XIX (2014) No. 2

A Prisoner and Agent in 1944 Romania. A Fragment of the Memoirs of Pilot Officer Bertrand Whitley*

Adrian BODA
Researcher, Lucian Blaga Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca

Keywords: War Memoirs, Prisoner, S.O.E. agent, Romania

Abstract. The article presents a fragment from the manuscript of R.A.F pilot officer Bertrand Whitley, focusing on his experience as prisoner of war and S.O.E. agent in Romania. This part of the memoirs is especially relevant for Romanian readers, as it presents the conditions of 1944 Romania, perceived by an Englishman. The author's experiences placed him in the position to know both rural Romania and the elite of Bucharest, as he witnessed the events of 23 August and the ensuing Soviet occupation. Apart from this, Whitley proved to be a fine observer of the period's moral standards, as well as a good portrait writer: the manuscript contains portraits of personalities of the time, like King Mihai I of Romania or Major Ivor Porter.

E-mail: adiboda@gmail.com

*

War memoirs have become one of the richest sources for the research of military history in the past century. The soldiers' experiences, whether in the trench wars of WWI or the horrors of the soldiers fighting in various theatres of operations in WWII, persisted in their memories, and not a few of them shared with society their individual perspectives on the war by volumes of memoirs. The evolution of mankind and the recurring military conflicts throughout its history place war narratives among the most frequent genres, as long as taking part in the war practically meant taking part in the making of history.[1] As regards the production of war memoirs, the 20th century witnessed a boom in such writings, apparent both from the impressive number of such works published, and the broad typology of the genre. Consequently, there are several types of memoirs: diary, with the subcategories of battlefield diary, war diary or campaign diary; memoirs of war; volumes of confessions about the war; war novels; and, last but not least, life narratives centred on times of war when their authors took part in military action.

Aviators' memories are among the most interesting narratives of this genre of historiography. The fascination with flying and the chivalry of aerial fights during the Great War explain the interest both of the public at large and of historians for this special

* The complete study will accompany the publication of the memoirs. This article only focuses on the fragment concerning the author's experiences in Romania.

[1] Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre", in *Narrative and Genre*, ed. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 26.

category of narratives. The development of aviation and the elitism of this weapon turned the memoirs and biographies of some of the famous pilots[1] of WWII real bestsellers at the very time of their publication. Apart from celebrity, the war had deeply affected the destinies of millions of fighters all over the world, simple people who only wanted to bear witness to their experiences on the battlefield. Bertrand Whitley, then a pilot officer of the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.)[2] and author of the manuscript *Benghazi to Bucharest*, belonged to this group. His memoirs, 159 leaves of typewritten text, were discovered in the archives of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj, in the currently catalogued Rațiu-Tilea collection.

The memoirs offer a perspective of the war from the position of a radio operator/machine gunner of the Bomber Command, the memories of these experiences betray a deep respect for the R.A.F. and the former comrades, and derive especially from the anxieties of the years following the war, often accompanied by remembrances of the events and dreams, or sometimes even nightmares, connected to these.[3] Beyond its evidential value for reconstructing the experience of the war, the manuscript is also of particular interest for the Romanian readers, as almost half of it treats the period of 6 May–end of November 1944, when the aeroplane carrying B. Whitley was shot down during the Anglo-American bombardments of Romania, he became a prisoner of war, and after his release, an S.O.E. agent in Romania. This paper offers a detailed presentation of this part of the memoirs, considered relevant because of the very few cases when foreign soldiers wrote consistent texts on the perception of Romania and its inhabitants in those times.

The autobiographic narrative starts with year 1938, when young Whitley was still a teenager concerned with spending his spare time around Scarborough, and ends with his retirement and age-specific concerns in the same town. The narration is visibly circular, the significant episode of his fighting in WWII connects the two endpoints. As regards the style, some of its aspects are apparent in the biographical construction: events are narrated in first person singular, they follow a chronological order, the presentation advances in short episodes of 1-3 pages, each with a title that summarizes the content of the episode. Interestingly, the memoirs lack the exact date of the events, which can be explained by the 40 or 50 years difference between the events and the recollection. Being aware of the lack of time references, the author specifies already on the 2nd leaf of the manuscript that, in order to establish the exact dates, one must check the flight diary, since all the narrated events are "indelibly printed on my mind".

---

[1] Some of these memoirs and biographies are: Hans Ulrich Rudell, *Stuka Pilot*, (New York, Ballantine Books, 1958); Adolf Galland, *The First and The Last: The Rise and Fall of the German Fighter Forces, 1938–1945*, (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1954); Raymonf F. Toliver and Trevor J. Constable, *The Blond Knight of Germany. A Biography of Erich Hartmann*, (Tab Aero Books, 1970); Saburo Sakai, *Samurai!*, (New York, ibooks.inc, 1957, 2001); Douglas Bader, *Fight for the Sky: The Story of the Spitfire and the Hurricane*, (Fontana, 1975); Aleksandr Ivanovich Pokryshkin, *Poznat' sebya v boyu* (*Know Yourself in Combat*). (ZAO Tsentrpoligraf, 2006).

[2] The Royal Air Force was the name of the British military aviation starting 1 April 1918, when the Royal Flying Corps, founded in 1912, was renamed.

[3] Bertrand Whitley, ms *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 6.

Teodora Cosman, *Jacob's Leather*
110cm x 80cm, acrylic, gouache on tissue, 2014

Although I proposed to present the fragment on Romanian experiences, it must be said that the text contains several other interesting episodes which deserve the reader's attention, but for reasons of space only the most representative of them will be mentioned. On the other hand, all these episodes are important for the author's evolution, as for him the war meant just as much a factor of reaching adulthood by the traumatizing events he had gone through, as one of widening his horizon and acquiring new knowledge on cultures and people. As the conflict was turning wider than ever before, young Whitley got to know new continents and countries, starting from the British colonies of Gibraltar and Malta, then going through the exotic countries of the African coast (Egypt, Libya, Kenya), the Middle East (Palestine), and finally arriving in Romania. This journey occasioned several descriptions of the places he had visited (the

pyramids of Giza/Gizeh), the Sphinx, the train trip through Kenya), as well as personalities he had met (General Bernard L. Montgomery, Major Ivor Porter, His Majesty Mihai I, King of Romania). The description of Romania and its inhabitants has a special place in his memoirs; this will be treated in detail in the pages to follow.

However, before turning to the author's Romanian experiences, one must consider the context that had made him a prisoner of war and then S.O.E. agent in 1944 Bucharest. The bomber mission in which the plane of pilot officer Whitley was shot down was part of the Anglo-American Combined Bomber Offensive of the Allied Forces after the Casablanca Conference. Initiated by the Pointblack directive of 14 June 1943, the bomber offensive targeted the destruction of key industries of the war effort in Axis powers. In addition to aircraft industry, submarine industry, and ball bearing production, the primary target was petrol industry,[1] for Romania's position as the main supplier of oil products for the Third Reich attracted the attention of the Allied decision makers as early as 1942.

The first bomber missions against oil extraction and processing industry in Prahova Valley were executed by groups of heavy bombers of American aviation. The "Halpro"[2] and "Tidalwave"[3] raids became references in the history of US aviation both because of the bombing strategy and the heavy losses they suffered. Due to the unsatisfactory results obtained at significant cost, the Anglo-American air forces only returned to Romania in the spring/summer of 1944, in a campaign which eventually led to the destruction of Romanian oil industry.

Beginning with the spring of 1944, bomber units of the R.A.F. also joined in the bombing of Romanian objectives. Unlike the Americans, whose strategy was precision

---

[1] David Wragg, *R.A.F. Handbook* (Phoenix Mill, Trupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2007), 47.

[2] Halpro – abbreviation for Halverson Project – the name of the secret mission for preparing long range action bomber operations. The 98th Bombardment Group sent on this mission was commanded by Colonel Harry A. Halverson. The attack mission on Romanian targets involved 13 B-24 Liberator bomber aircraft on 12 June 1942, but the results of the raid were unsatisfactory for the Allied as the damage to petrol industry was insignificant. This was the first American bomber mission on the European continent.

[3] "Tidal Wave" operation is considered the most heroic bomber mission of US aviation. The raid on 1 August 1943, by five B-24 Liberator bomber groups of the 9th Air Force were a premiere for the mode of attacking, low altitude bombardment, an unusual procedure for heavy bomber units. Although the attack was a partial success, the casualties rising to 310 dead, 108 prisoners and 78 aviators arrested in Turkey made it the costliest single mission of US aviation. The heroism of those who took part in the raid was rewarded by 5 Medals of Honour and several Distinguished Service Crosses, Silver Stars and Distinguished Flying Crosses. For further details on this mission, see: James Dugan and Carroll Stewart, *Ploesti: The Great Ground-Air Battle of 1 August 1943*, Revised Edition (Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 2002); Jay A. Stout, *Fortăreaţa Ploieşti. Campania pentru distrugerea petrolului lui Hitler* (Fortress Ploiesti. The Campaign for Destroying Hitler's oil) (Bucharest: Meditaţii, 2010); Leroy. W Newby, *Target Ploesti. View from a Bombsight.* (Presidio, 1983); Idem, *Into the Guns of Ploesti. The Human Drama of the Bomber War for Hitler's oil. 1942-1944*, (Motorbooks Intl, 1991); Mihai Pelin, *Raidul escadrei trădate. Bombardamente asupra României 1941-1944* (*The Raid of the Betrayed Squadron. Bombing over Romania 1941-1944*) (Bucharest: Elion, 2005). This was the highest number of congressional medals of honour awarded for a single mission in the history of the US Army Air Force.

bombing in daytime with compact bombing units, the British used night bombing ever since the beginning of WWII, with smaller units, employing modern means of target detection and marking and bombing procedures.[1] The main unit that had the mission to attack Romanian targets was the Allied Air Force of the Mediterranean, with the 15th Air Force at its core, activated in Tunisia on 1 November 1943. It was based in Foggia-Bari region, Italy, having a position that facilitated attacks on south-eastern European targets.[2]

This force of strategic bombing also included No. 205 Heavy Bomber Group of R.A.F., headed by Air Commodore J.H.T. Simpson. The group was originally formed in Egypt, at Shallufa, in November 1941, as a support unit for British troops in the Eastern Mediterranean, and it was moved to Foggia area in the end of 1943. The group was initially made up of Wing[3] 231 (Squadrons 37 and 70) and 236 (Squadrons 40 and 104), then it was gradually adjoined by Wing 330 (Squadrons 142 and 150) in May 1943, and Wing 240 (Squadrons 178 and 614) in March 1944.[4] The subunit of pilot officer Bertrand Whitley, Squadron 178, was part of Aviation Wing 240. It was initially based in Shandur, Egypt, beginning on the 15th of January 1943, engaged in missions of heavy bombing first from Egypt then Libya, and later moved to Italy. The unit flew B-24 Liberators throughout the war, first using variant II, then getting variants III and IV in the second half of 1943, and finally variant VI in 1944. Operations included bomber missions in North Africa, Sicily, Crete, the Greek islands, Italy and the Balkans, mining operations and air drop missions to supply the besieged Warsaw army in August-September 1944.[5]

The B-24 Liberator aboard which the author also flew, was the bomber aircraft produced in the largest numbers during WWII. The 19,256 aircraft produced made it the most successful bomber in the history of aviation.[6] The name is associated with the attacks on Romania (Halpro and Tidal Wave operations); this model was prevalent in most bomber groups of the Mediterranean theatre of war, and was also used by the British due to its easy adaptability to night bomber operations.[7] Whitley's position within the crew was

---

[1] Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare. The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing. 1914-1945*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 223.

[2] Jay A. Stout, *Fortăreaţa Ploieşti...*, 118–119.

[3] The Aviation Wing was a command unit of R.A.F. with several squadrons in its subordination. Its correspondent is Aviation Group in U.S.A.F., and Geschwader in Luftwaffe.

[4] Patrick Macdonald, *Through Darkness to Light*, (Upton upon Severn: Image Publishing Malvern Ltd., 1994), 21.

[5] Philip J.R. Moyes, *Royal Air Force Bombers of World War Two*, (Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company Inc., 1968), 27.

[6] Francis Crosby, *The World Encyclopedia of Fighters & Bombers*, (London, Lorenz Books, 2007), 319.

[7] The Consolidated B-24 Liberator had the following technical characteristics: crew – 8 persons; powerplant – 4 X Pratt and Whitney R-1830-56 Wasp of 1200 hp each; wingspan – 33.35 m; length – 20.47 m; wing area – 97.36 m^2; empty weight – 16,556 kg, loaded weight – 25,401 kg; bomb load: 2268 kg; maximum speed 482 km/h at an altitude of 9144 m; fight speed – 290-350 km/h at altitudes of 3000-7600 m; service ceiling – 9753 m; autonomy – 3685 km with 1814 kg bomb load; 1593 km with 5805 kg bomb load; armament – 10 × .50 caliber (12.7 mm) M2 Browning machine guns in 4 turrets and two waist positions.

radio operator / machine gunner in charge of radio contact during operations and communication with the other planes in the formation. Since transmissions were usually forbidden on the way to the target and in the target area in order to avoid detection, the radio operator was often also a board machine gunner. Training courses for radio operators were among the longest ones, as they had to master all details about codes and transmission procedures and the functioning of the special equipment. The training of a radio operator/machine gunner usually lasted around 18 months, cumulated with flight training and air shooting courses lasting at least 6 weeks. This was followed by their dispatch to operative units.[1]

In what follows, I shall present the most consistent part of the memoirs, when Whitley's plane was shot down, he became a prisoner, and then an S.O.E. agent in Romania, as an important episode of the memoirs for a Romanian reader. As a fine observer of his surroundings, the author offered detailed descriptions of people and places, with many references to the Romanian landscape, the rural and urban population of the country, the living conditions of these categories, the description of the detention camp for the prisoners and their way of life, and the escape attempts. The events of 23 August 1944 put the young aviator at the centre of the events, as he witnessed the bombing of the capital city and the German attempts regain control of the situation. As a radio operator charged with making contact with the Allied Command of the Mediterranean, he came to personally meet His Majesty, King Mihai I of Romania, Major Ivor Porter, head of S.O.E. network in Romania, as well as ordinary Romanian people, cementing friendships lasting a lifetime. One of the important experiences of the author after his release was his employment as an S.O.E. agent, as his work offered him the opportunity to get in contact with the society of Bucharest, taking part in parties and being surprised by their great number. This presentation will respect the order of sequences and the way the author organized his memories, stopping at the main events that the narration refers to. In order to conduct a most complete and truthful analysis of the events, I used information derived from secondary sources, bibliography, archival documents, as well as the published memoirs of his fellow prisoners in Romania.

As the introduction to the autobiographic narrative, the author chooses the dramatic turning point of his experience, the plane shot down on the night of 6/7 May, maybe to also emphasize how close he was that night to death and the "end of the story which begins on the next page".[2] The placement of this event at the very beginning of the manuscript marks its importance, as the remembrance of ensuing events in captivity and after the war was possible owing to the author's survival. The fight operation when his plane was shot down took place in the night of 6/7 May 1944, the third night of attacks of Squadron 178 on the marshalling yards of Bucharest. After taking off at Cellone at 8.20 p.m., the flight above the Adriatic Sea and the mountains of Yugoslavia went well, the first problems appeared during the bombing: "All went well until we arrived just short of the target. On the first bomb run, the bombs hung-up and we had to go round again. On the second, tense, run up to target, with Bomb-aimer calling for *bomb doors open*, followed by the usual *left a bit* and so on. *No good* he says, *bombs haven't dropped.* Off we went round again to make another run-in from the same

[1] David Wragg, *R.A.F. Handbook*,127–128.
[2] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 7.

direction which gave the bomb aimer points to lay-off by." The bomb launching mechanism was blocked, so Bert was sent to the bomb room to fix the defect, and thus he came in contact with the terrible air defence of Bucharest: "With bomb bay doors open there was next to nothing between me and the lights, fires, searchlights and ack ack of an angry Bucharest. Savage amusement! and not one to be recommended for enjoyment."[1]

The repetition of bomb launching procedures put the aircraft into a dangerous position: it was left alone and probably haunted by air defence systems: "even more than normally, we were at risk. As tail-end charlie, not only had we already had all the ack ack to ourselves, but were prey to any night fighter chasing raiders away." The inevitable happened, the bomber was attacked by a night raider and was damaged and eventually taken down: "We had left the target, say twenty minutes or half an hour behind - when, suddenly, all hell broke loose and 20 mm. cannon shells riddled the whole aircraft. From my position, daylight appeared everywhere. It wasn't daylight, but the night sky. There were holes all over the aircraft, with a nasty smell of cordite and crashes of minor explosions - and worse, fire! I will never forget the thought that flashed across my mind, as shells passed either side of me, *don't shoot my parachute* which lay a yard or more away from me. The order to ABANDON AIRCRAFT was given and I left by the port beam aperture, with guns still in position, a thing they say you cannot do."[2]

In contrast with all the emotions and bustle of the aforementioned scene, the parachute jump is described in full detail, associated with peace and quiet, being, obviously, the most intense experience of the author in this event: "By this time the Lib. was in a spiraling dive. I counted, eight, nine, ten and pulled the rip cord. No such thing, it's a large D shaped handle. Nothing happened. I had the sense to lift the chute cover off the central pin and then the parachute opened... When the parachute fully opened, there was an enormous jerk, taken between my legs. The pain was terrific, making me feel sick, so much so that I had to spit out the piece of chocolate which had been in my mouth all through the previous happenings. ... How peaceful and quiet. No engines, no cannon shells, just peace and quiet - all on my own in the middle of nowhere."[3]

On the night of 6 to 7 May, the British Group 205 lost 4 pieces of equipment above Romania: 1 Wellington bomber shot at 23.45, attributed to Captain Herbert Lütje; 1 Wellington bomber shot at 00.16, attributed to *Oberfeldwebel* Ulrich von Meien; 1Wellington bomber shot at 00.30, attributed to *Oberfeldwebel* Maisch; 1 B-24 Liberator bomber, shot at 01.06 by Captain Martin Bauer.[4] The aircraft Messerschmitt Bf 110 G-4, with indicator 2Z+EV, flown by Bauer, and having aboard Oberfeldwebel Rudi Stäbler as radio operator, took off from Zilişstea airfield at 23.06, and was directed against the B-24 Liberator flown by Sergent William Molyneux, which it attacked and shot down in the area of Belciug settlement, approximately 10 km north of Roşiorii de Vede. The German aircraft returned to the base at 01.47, the air victory was confirmed two days later.[5]

---

[1] Ibid., 86–87.
[2] Ibid., 87–88.
[3] Ibid., 88–89.
[4] Jean L. Roba and Cristian Crăciunoiu, *La chasse de nuit germano-roumaine 1943-1944*, (Bucureşti, Ed. Modelism, 1997), 50.
[5] Ibid.

The victims of the German pilot, according to archival sources, were: Sergeant William A. Molyneux, pilot – **dead**; Sgt. Cecil "Dusty" Rhodes, radio operator – **dead**; Sgt. Henry Langley, navigator – **dead**; Sgt. James Velzian, machine gunner – **dead**; Sgt. Harold Tucker, machine gunner – **dead**; pilot officer Bertrand Whitley, radio/machine gunner – **prisoner of war**; Flight Engineer Kenneth White – **prisoner of war**.[1] Evidence from the electronic database of R.A.F. Commands also confirms the Romanian archival sources.[2] Another instance on the shooting of the British aircraft appears in the notes of the gendarme station of Slăveşti: "We report that on the night of 6-7 V 944 time 1.20 the Romanian Hunting Plane (sic!) have given an air fight (sic!) with the hostile bomber aircraft, shooting down an English aircraft on the territory of Gârdeşti commune. Until now four dead English aviators and one alive have been found. We are engaged in chasing the rest of the parachutists who might have landed. Chief of section, Sg. Maj. I.H. (illegible)"[3] Corroborating the description of this note with information from Whitley's manuscript (his mentioning that the flight engineer returned to the wreck right after landing, the place of the crash, Gârdeşti commune to which Belciug village belonged, and the time of the crash) seems to prove that the police report refers to the plane that Whitley was aboard.

There are many similarities in individual experiences of the outstanding moments of crash, the jump with the parachute, and then the contacts with a hostile country and its inhabitants. The aviators shared the same emotions, from the first impressions of Romanian territory and to their capturing and treatment by Romanian peasants and soldiers. The memoirs contain almost identical passages even if their authors crashed in different places of the country and at different times. The first similarities appeared already at the description of the jump from the aircraft, the young man were affected by the experience and especially the fear not to hurt themselves as they landed, for which reason landing procedures were most carefully executed: "Then, doing only the things once told to do (there had been no dummy-runs), I relaxed and let my knees go slightly bent. Still couldn't tell exactly how far below terra firma was, but at that very moment, landed and sagged on to my back. A good landing."[4]

Another British aviator had a similar experience the following night,[5] describing it in almost identical terms: "On reaching terra firma, I bent my legs and rolled over in the prescribed fashion, finding myself in a soft muddy field."[6] Happily, the crew of this plane managed to survive, but was later captured and imprisoned in the prisoner camps

[1] Romanian Military Archives Pitesti, (R.M.A.P.), Fond 5435 - General Headquarters, Prisoners Section, file 729, 705 - dead, 110 - reference to B. Whitley and 113 - reference to K. White.

[2] http://www.rafcommands.com/forum/showthread.php?8666-Liberator-of-178-sq-lost-7.5.44-Romania, accessed 12 February 2013, 02.16.

[3] Romanian National Archives (R.N.A.), Teleorman County Direction, County Police Legion Documents, file 286/1943-1944, 170.

[4] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 89.

[5] This was Flight officer Dudley Egles, who fought in the night raid of 7 to 8 May 1944 against the same marshalling yards, his plane, a Halifax with identification number JP 111 belonging to Squadron 614 was shot down at Orbeasca de Sus (20 km from Alexandria) by Oberleutnant Günther Franz of 10/NJG 6 at 00.20.

[6] Dudley C. Egles, *Just One Of The Many - A Navigator's Memoirs*, (Edinburgh, Cambridge, Durham, USA, The Pentland Press Limited, 1996), 91.

at Bucharest.[1] The documents of the police station of Orbeasca commune also mentioned that they were captured. On 8 May 1944, the local police station was informed that Flight Officer Egles was captured in the woods by the peasants Tone Tudor, Tudor Păun and others. There is also reference to the rescue of the other aviators from the plane shot down by German aviation, who were caught, brought to the station and interrogated, then handed over to higher authorities: 1. Dudley Egles, Flight Officer (Great Britain), aged 23, electrical engineer – he surrendered to shepherds at Clănița; 2. Norman Foster, Flight Sergeant (New Zealand), aged 24, teacher –voluntarily surrendered to Zamfir M. Constantin of Orbeasca de Sus; 3. Ronald Williams, Flight Sergeant, aged 23 (Canada), voluntarily turned themselves in to pre-military Zamfir M. Constantin.[2] Two of the aviators were photographed right after they had been captured; the reproduced image was taken over from the monograph of Orbeasca commune, Teleorman County.

Hiding their parachute and looking for orientation marks to the west were the first concerns of the aviators after their landing, they both planned to cross the Danube and reach Italy via Yugoslavia. "Gathering the chute was a bigger job than I thought, but soon made a bundle of it and carried it to the end of the field I had landed in. ...So I set off to walk, in what I judged to be a Westerly direction ... and even negotiate the river Danube, if I was to make it back to base via Yugoslavia."[3]; "My first job was to hide my parachute, which I did beneath some convenient bushes, and then I started walking westwards - towards Yugoslavia. Stars were still visible, including Ursa Major, so I was able to check my direction."[4]

The territory of Romania was perceived similarly, the breaking day giving them a chance to formulate some impressions on the geography of the place they had landed on. The recurring feeling was that of desertion: "It occured *(sic!)*to me that, in the miles covered, I had not seen a single live animal. No sheep, no cows or even an animal in any of the fields I had passed and could see, for miles around...I began to wonder why I had not come upon some sign of civilisation, a village perhaps.[5]"; "I walked for about a couple of hours before I saw any signs of habitation, some buildings of what appeared to be a farm."[6]

Having found themselves in a hostile country without any resources for subsistence, the British had first tried to resist as long as they could without asking for help, but eventually, whether willingly or by accident, they came in contact with peasants working the fields. Before moving on to present the image they described, it must be mentioned that the perception of Anglo-American aviators must have been

[1] Members of the crew: Flight officer N. Dear; navigator - Flight officer Dudley Egles; machine gunner: Flight Sergeant P. Godfrey; machine gunner - Flight Sergeant Ronald Williams; machine gunner - Flight Sergeant P. Beevor machine gunner: Flight Sergeant Norman Foster appears on the list of war prisoners of the R.M.A.P., collection 5435 – General Headquarters, Prisoners Section, file 729, 108–113.
[2] R.N.A., Teleorman County Direction, County Police Legion Documents, file 329/1944, 60.
[3] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 89.
[4] D. C. Egles, *Just One Of The Many...*, 91.
[5] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 92.
[6] D. C. Egles, *Just One Of The Many...*, 92.

influenced by the instructions they received to familiarize them with Romanian and its inhabitants. The notes about Romania of the American aviators captured after the Tidal Wave raid of 1 August 1943 describe the image of an honest, friendly and hospitable Romanian peasant. The aviators were encouraged to behave friendly with them, as „Romanians are a people with great moral dignity and they respect those who are like them".[1]

Pilot officer Whitley's first contact with the locals happened in the morning following his landing: he was hiding from the peasants who went to the fields. Eventually, after one more night he spent in the fields, and forced by hunger and thirst, he decided to ask for the help of the first person who came across; this was going to cost his freedom. "I had now gone two days without a drop to wet my whistle with. I resumed my walking with every intention of accosting the next living soul I should meet. ... Not far in from the corner, was a farmer, sat enjoying his morning *cuppa*. Through a gap in the hedge I approached him. As soon as he saw me, he stood up and made a command to his dog. I made signs that I required a drink. The farmer motioned me to sit down, then gave me a small bowl of goat's milk. It was foul, but I got it down. He made another command to his dog, then turned and wandered off to the corner of the field and disappeared behind hedges. Any time that I so much as moved a finger, the dog was ready to go for me - obviously he had been told to guard me."[2]

Dogs are also present in other memoir fragments on the capturing of British aviators. Egles mentions the fact that he was woken up by the barking of dogs, accompanied by peasants with hay forks; another aviator remembered his fearful encounter with the dogs: "Dawn- peasants near - dogs barking - saw two peasants without shoes, wearing light brown coats and sheepskin hats... dogs suddenly scented me - stood still for fully five minutes behind a tree - three big savage dogs within 50 yards of me - they went away eventually."[3]

In general, strangers were well treated by Romanian peasants, offered food and drink (D. Egles and D. Calvert), then they were handed over to the authorities. In Whitley's case, his welcome was not very warm, the policemen brought by the peasant he asked for water treated him quite roughly: "Then, an army soldier, rifle pointing at me, appeared behind me, to be followed by three others, also with rifles pointing at me. I stood up and raised my arms, in surrender. I was searched, then prodded in the back to shouts of *Mama lui*, which I was told months later, was an abbreviated Romanian Curse."[4]

---

[1] Mircea Pietreanu," Prizonierii americani învață limba română" (Amerian prisoners learning Romanian), *Magazin Istoric* 2 (1993): 58.

[2] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 93.

[3] Patrick Macdonald, *Through Darkness to Light*, 118 – the memories of Flight Officer Douglas Calvert, rear machine gunner on the aircraft Wellington BL-X, of Squadron 40, shot down on the night of 7/8 May 1944 near Vârtoapele village (in the neighbourhood of Roşiorii de Vede). The other four members of the crew were lost, only Calvert managed to save himself. He was later captured and imprisoned together with Whitley and other British officers. His name appears on the list of prisoners of war of R.M.A.P. documents, Fond 5435 - General Headquarters Prisoners Section, file 729, 191 verso.

[4] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest* , 93.

Surrounded by three policemen, the prisoner was escorted to the closest village (probably Belciug or Gârdeşti). The village was compared to British villages, the attitude of the peasants staring at him was annoying: "From being shot down, right untill now, I had no idea if Romanians would be friendly or otherwise. Treatment, so far, had been of the otherwise variety. I secretly hoped that the guards would protect me, should the villagers prove to be hostile. All I got were stares from solemn faces."[1]

The pages to follow describe the period Whitley spent in arrest at the police station, where his cell neighbour was most probably Flight Engineer Kenneth White: "Occupying one of the cells was our flight engineer, who had made for the burning Liberator as soon as he landed. There he had been captured and brought to this place, two days before."[2] The prisoners went through the first interrogations; the main interest of the chief of the police station was the parachutes, obviously because of the silk they were made of. The daily monotony of a prisoner's life was broken in the evenings by the chief's daughter, who brought water, polenta, and sometimes a piece of black bread, which were the only meals the prisoners received. The state of poverty was more than obvious: "If that is what the peasant population lived on, then they must be very poor people indeed".

After a week, the prisoners were taken by cart to the nearest rail-head, which the author thought was Turnu Severin, but that must have been an error in identifying the settlement, especially if we think of the length of the journey: "... all the way to the nearest rail-head which turned to be at Turnu Severin. Setting off early in the morning, the journey took untill well into the afternoon."[3] The distance between Belciug and Drobeta Turnu Severin is approximately 244 km, and it is impossible to be travelled with a horse ridden cart in the mentioned time period. The confusion was settled by a document in which the Turnu Măgurele Garrison asked the police stations to transport the prisoners by cart to Roşiorii de Vede, from where they were to be taken by train, under escort, to Turnu Măgurele.[4]

The travel to the rail-head, the image of the railway station and the carriages gave the author a familiar feeling, as it all reminded him of Great Britain: "as the hay cart made his way I could not help thinking that, just as on my lonely walk, the countryside (excepting the lack of farm animals) very much resembled English countryside, so pleasant and green was it...We arrived at the railway station - all very European looking ...The carriages reminded me of English trains, pre war stuff, being very similar even to the corridors."[5]

The next stop is the town of Turnu Măgurele, where the two English officers were interrogated by a superior officer, and then put up for the night with another group of American prisoners. From here, a group of 20 prisoners were sent in a truck to Bucharest, and Whitley was separated from his comrade, probably because of their military ranks (Whitley – a Pilot officer, K. White – a sergeant) The final destination was the Saint Catherine (Sfânta Ecaterina) camp, the building of a former high school: "I

[1] Ibid., 94.
[2] Ibid., 95.
[3] Ibid., 97.
[4] R.N.A., Teleorman County Direction, County Police Legion Documents, file 286/1943-1944, 173.
[5] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 98.

was the only one of the party to be dropped off at what surely must have been a school building. I learned later that indeed it was known as *Santa Ecaterina School* and was right in the centre of Bucharest."[1]

This building was situated on no. 12 Sfânta Ecaterina Street, and was part of the complex that housed the Allied prisoners of war, known as Camp no. 13. In addition to this building, the complex also included the former "Mihai Viteazul" barracks, where the inferior rank soldiers were kept, as well as two rooms for the injured in the Queen Elisabeth (Regina Elisabeta) military hospital. As for the numbers, in the period between 1 August 1943 and 23 August 1944, around 2500 Anglo-American aviators were reported missing above Romanian territory, of these 2290 were shot down during the offensive against Romanian oil in April-August 1944. By 23 August, over 860 prisoners managed to return to bases in Italy via Yugoslavia and Turkey, while of those left in Romania 1161 were American, 31 British, 12 Dutch and 1 was French.[2]

According to archival evidence, Pilot officer Bertrand Whitley was recorded by Romanian authorities with no. 161367 on 06.05.1944, and imprisoned in Saint Catherine Camp. Other British prisoners also arrived the following days: Flight officer Dudley Egles, no. 147142, recorded on 10.05.1944, Saint Catherine Camp; H.D. Calvert, no. 120174, recorded on 19.05.1944, Saint Catherine Camp.[3] The other members of the crews with inferior ranks were sent to Camp Saint Catherine 2, probably the former Mihai Viteazul Barracks.

Being a prisoner is a significant period in any soldier's life. Therefore it generally occupies an important part of war memories, especially due to living conditions in imprisonment, an inadequate diet, and the works that prisoners were forced to do. In what regards these aspects, the terrible detention conditions for prisoners in Soviet or German camps are well-known; these could often be considered true extermination camps. In contrast, the Anglo-American prisoners in Romania enjoyed conditions of lodging and diet that were comparatively fair for that period. This was due to the attitude of decision makers towards the Allied Forces, as well as to the historical context in which Romania was engaged in negotiations to leave the German side and adhere to the Allied Forces. The most important thing for these prisoners must have been the fact that the Romanian authorities refused to hand them over to German allies, thus they escaped being sent to prisoner camps on the territory of the Reich.

For all Allied aviators captured in Romania it was a challenging situation to be a prisoner, as, besides their new status, they also got to know a society and a country completely different from the one they had been raised and educated in. Nevertheless, their overall remembrance of the period spent in Romania was generally positive. The detention conditions for American prisoners at Timişul de Jos were considered to be quite good, and they remembered indeed their captivity with pleasure despite their awkward situation. The opinion of the Americans was best illustrated by the words of a prisoner: "if I had to be shot down, I was glad it had happened above Romania".[4] For the

[1] Ibid.,100.
[2] Patrick Macdonald, *Through Darkness to Light*, 250.
[3] R.M.A.P., Fond 5435- General Headquarters, Prisoners Section, file 729, 108, 110, 191 verso.
[4] Donald R. Falls, "Prizonierii de război americani la Timiş şi Bucureşti" (American prisoners of war at Timiş and Bucharest), *Magazin Istoric* 1 (1992): 76.

prisoners taken to Bucharest, however, things were different. They also had to bear the dangers of air raids of their own air forces together with the townspeople, while their living conditions were precarious. The description of these, as well as the everydays of the camp takes up a significant part of the memoirs.

The first memories of Pilot Officer Whitley's life as a prisoner are about the building of the camp, which he describes in detail together with the surroundings: "My first job was to recconoitre (*sic!*) this erstwhile school building. It was a rectangular building with the long side (with windows) parallel to a minor road, beyond which was a small public park....Almost all the rooms in the *school* had windows overlooking the road and park. There were three floors above ground and a sizeable basement below ground level. The whole building, with courtyard, stood in its own grounds, again rectangular and certainly not large. The courtyard, shale, was the only open space, say 30 by 20 yards, into which new arrivals were driven, as was the occasional lorry."[1]

The image of the guards as described by the prisoners' memories is not at all flattering. It definitely exceeds the clichés of the documentation that the Allied aviators had received: Romanian guards were called soldier-peasants utterly lacking body hygiene, for which reason the prisoners avoided any contact with them, for fear of being infested with parasites: "In the main part, the guards were men of middle age, but none the less antagonistic for that. ... The guards, middle aged farmer's boys, or peasants, were not very clean and would, if chance permitted, occasionally rest their weary legs by sitting on any bed which was unoccupied, near a doorway. In no time at all, the bed occupant would find that he was lousy."[2] Officers D.C. Egles and D. Calvert offer very similar descriptions: "The guards were all Romanians, mostly middle-aged and very poorly equipped. Their uniforms were very shoddy and many of their boots were patched on the uppers."[3]; "The guards never seemed to take their clothes off. They just lay down and slept during their time off. Sometimes they washed feet, hands and face, and occasionally shaved. Their food appeared to be entirely bean soup and bread. This bread tasted very sour."[4]

The everyday life in the camp is described in all its aspects, from the crowdy rooms full of beds to the unhealthy conditions in bathrooms and the fight with the nightmare of parasites. The daily menu was noted to be very poor: Whitley stated that food was more than scarce: "Food was almost non-existant *(sic!)*. At a bell signal we would all troop down to the basement *dining room* and be served a mug of ersatz coffee and one small hunk of rough, dry black bread...That was breakfast. No lunch. In the evening, the same drill would apply for a small bowl of watery soup which was disguised by a sprinkling of red pepper, together with another hunk of black bread."[5] In opposition with this, the daily menu mentioned in Egles's memoires seemed quite plentiful, although lacking diversity: "Food was very basic indeed, but none of us starved. A typical menu would be: breakfast - bread and jam and apa dolce (water with sugar in it); lunch - potato soup and beans, with water to drink; dinner - vegetable salad,

[1] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 102.
[2] Ibid.,103–105.
[3] D. C. Egles, , *Just One Of The Many...*, 94.
[4] Patrick Macdonald, *Through Darkness to Light*, 121.
[5] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 105.

with cheese, onions and water. We occasionally had meat stew....The cooking and serving was done by Russian prisoners..."[1] The problem of food was very important for Whitley, as he lost very much weight during the first three weeks of this detention. For this, he held responsible Colonel Victor Ioanid, the commander of the camp, whom he accused of theft from the income set aside for the subsistence of the prisoners. His lack of sympathy for the colonel is apparent from his description: "All the prisoners were made well aware of who was in charge. A grotesque Romanian Colonel, about six feet two inches tall, with circumference to match, by that I mean he measured six feet two inches round the waist. He had an enormous pot belly. He spoke no English, yet spent much of his time bellowing at us, generally without much effect. He was a very bad and quick tempered man, who would be as nasty to his guardsmen as he was to us. This man used to fly into a terrible rage, going red in the face and strike his guards across the face, as often as not, when addressing them. ... As the Colonel in charge, he lived the life of a crook, an evil crook. He observed none of the conventions and proceeded to line his own pocket with that which should have fed us."[2]

One of the most serious problems prisoners had to face was the parasites, which, joined with insufficient food and a weakened organism, led to the outburst of epidemics. This was also favoured by the lack of medical treatment: the only measure taken to stop epidemics was that an oven was brought to boil the clothes of prisoners and guards: "Lice were really tough, clinging parasites - they can nip like a pair of pincers. The only way to get rid of them was to pick them off, one at a time, then kill them by crushing between one's two thumb nails....Lice can start an epidemic of typhus. That is why we made repeated representations to the camp authority to do something about the problem."[3]

Since prisoners were not taken to labour, spending their spare time was a real challenge. A major problem British aviators had to face, at least at the beginning of their detention, was their isolation from American aviators. Although, as the author said, "the ice was gradually broken, and we all got to know where everyone came from", when some of their R.A.F. comrades appeared, it was indeed a reason for happiness. Consequently the author dedicated an entire subchapter to the arrival of Flight officer D. Calvert: "A Royal Air Force Companion", expressing his joy over finding one of his British comrades.

Apart from discussions between the prisoners, few other means of socialization or entertainment are mentioned; the author notes the lack of these: "The prison was without anything to occupy the inmates. We had no books or games. No cards and absolutely nothing with which to amuse ourselves"[4] Still, prisoners could go out in the camp's courtyard, one room at a time, and the Americans used this opportunity to exercise. To amuse themselves, they would make fun of the guards and especially the commander, mentioning in this respect the author's attempt to set fire to the load of parachutes collected and brought on trucks to the camp to be stored in the basement. To spend their spare time, Whitley with two other prisoners wrote a camp newspaper. One

[1] D. C. Egles, *Just One Of The Many...*, 97.
[2] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest* , 108–110.
[3] Ibid., 106.
[4] Ibid., 104.

of them gathered information from the guards, these were sorted and arranged according to subjects, then written on sheets of paper also obtained from the guards: "When the three of us were happy with the result, I would use my skills, learned as layout artist in Lewis's advertising department and draw up, with pencil, a newspaper-like sheet of news items, with headings and sub-headings. This news sheet we produced once a week, with all the information gathered, and stuck it on a door in the corridor, outside our room, for all to read."[1]

As they had nothing to busy themselves with, they had the time to plan their escape. Whitley with other three comrades plotted a daring plan, and even began the operations to dig a tunnel. In regard to the escape plan, interestingly and remarkably, this episode appears in two distinct sources, Whitley and Egles, and the recollection is almost identical in both of them, from the description of the place where the work started to the tools used for digging. In turn, both authors avoided direct reference to the name of their colleagues involved in the attempted escape, mentioning only that they had elaborated the plan and had tried to implement it together with some other people. "By this time, it was July, **Herc, myself and two others** whom we had persuaded to join and help us, set about the problem of escaping. Discussion came first. We concluded that with the many guards inside and out, the only way to get out would be to **tunnel**...The large room we entered had been a small theatre. From **underneath the stage, via some narrow stairs** we got to an unused part of the basement. Further, took us to a little sub-basement cellar."[2] The almost identical description of the place and the way it was discovered makes us believe that one of the unnamed persons in Whitley's manuscript was D. Egles, and this is also valid about Egles's manuscript mentioning Whitley: "We managed to start a **tunnel**. **Some chaps** had found **a door behind the stage** in the old school assembly hall. It was opened and was found to give access to a small semi-basement room... It was decided that this would be a good place to start a tunnel in time-honoured P.O.W. fashion."[3]

Another parallelism between the two sources is connected to the tools used for digging the tunnel, as both mentioned the same tools: "...We had just one **two pound hammer and one chisel** between us. ..."(Bert Whitley); "The wall was about two feet thick, but with the **hammer and chisel** bequeathed me by my rear-gunner and various odd bits of metal that had been collected a start was made" (D. Egles). Eventually the tunnel escape attempt was abandoned, because the works were slowed down both by the concrete wall of the building, and even more by the acceleration of the events because of the approaching front line.

The prisoners' life improved to a certain extent when they received packs from the Red Cross at the end of July 1944. Although the packs contained no remarkable things, they still had a great impact on the morale of the prisoners: "There was nothing of real food in the parcels, but tit-bits, such as cookies - as the Yanks call biscuits - and some sweets which were handed round. ...This great occasion, added to the news of the Second Front was a great morale booster."[4]

---

[1] Ibid., 107.
[2] Ibid., 111.
[3] D. C. Egles, *Just One Of The Many...*, 96.
[4] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 113.

The political and military situation of Romania in the period preceding the events of 23 August is analyzed in a whole subchapter, which suggests that at the time it was a subject much discussed among the prisoners. The sources were the news the prisoners found out from the guards worried because of the approaching front, and information gathered from the Romanian newspapers they occasionally received. The news of the approaching front line and the withdrawal of Germans from Romania, with the perspective of their being moved to Germany enforced Whitley's decision to escape, planning with D. Calvert to walk out through the prison gate during an air raid, when security was less strict: "I was disturbed at the thought of being transferred to Germany. Doug Calvert and myself decided, somehow, to get out of prison. ... It would have to be a case of walking out of the front gate."[1]

Eventually, Whitley escaped by himself, during a night raid, hiding in a trench close to the camp, from where he got to a secure part of the capital city with the help of a civilian. "..in darkness and during another raid, alone, I got past the one guard who had not sheltered and scampered across the road, into the park and straight down into the slit trench.... I approached this man and talked to him quietly. He sounded friendly and helpful. ... I had nothing to lose, decided to trust him and set off."[2] He was taken to an apartment of a Jewish family, Martin and Coca Horovitz, where he stayed until after 23 August, remaining life-long friends, and helping them emigrate after the war. The period he spent with them is described in the subchapter "Martin and Coca Horovitz". The author was impressed by their courage, who exposed themselves from two perspectives: "Coca and Martin were sticking their necks out, not least by sheltering an enemy, but, as Jews, their position could have the most serious consequences.... For the Horovitzes - Jews in a German occupied country - it was a double act of courage to hide me at their home in Bucharest."[3]

During his stay in the apartment of the Horovitzes, Bertrand had to opportunity to discuss many timely subjects of the day, such as the status of Jews in Romania, the situation of the front line, the difficult position of the country in the context of the war. The Horovitzes also gave the explanation to one of Whitley's most ardent dilemmas he faced in Romania, namely the lack of animals: "All this livestock, totalling millions, had been pillaged by the Germans, and transported away to feed Germany's armies all over Europe... So, I had the answer to that which had been puzzling me since my attempts to walk home, when first shot down. I had seen no livestock anywhere."[4]

Being a fugitive, the author had to face the unusual situation during the air raids over Bucharest of being bombed by his own aviation while hidden among the enemy. Although he avoided leaving the apartment, one intense night raid of the British air force made him leave it to a common shelter. The description betrays the intensity of the situation: "There was little room to spare, which made it less obvious for Coca to sit on my knee in an attempt to hide me. A **G**erman guard was on duty, no doubt looking for anyone who should not be there. There I was in R.A.F. battledress! The guard arrived at the end of our row and as he approached I could hear, nay, feel Coca's heart beating

[1] Ibid., 116.
[2] Ibid., 117.
[3] Ibid., 118, 120.
[4] Ibid., 121.

rapidly - guess mine was pounding at an even faster rate. We three could feel the suspense."[1]

In remembrance of the events of 23 August, references are made to the Proclamation of the king to the country, the description of the events which led to the arrest of Marshal Antonescu at the Palace and the new political and military status of the country. These references were obviously made on the basis of later knowledge, as the author was still hiding in the apartment of the Horovitzes at that time. He witnessed the attempts of the Germans to regain Bucharest by air raids, describing the effects and the confusion: "The Junkers and Stukas[2] were repeatedly bombed-up and made continuous round trips, from Mizil to Bucharest, indiscriminately bombing the city, round the clock... The Germans controlled the sirens, which made for complete chaos... All parts of Bucharest suffered. The Palace was severely damaged, as were civic buildings and housing. This continual reign of terror went on, without halt, for some days and nights."[3]

The author then briefly discusses the history of the monarchy in Romania, starting with the rule of Kind Ferdinand to the situation of King Mihai at the time of writing the memoirs, when he was in Geneva. The fragment prepares the reader for the moment of Whitley's meeting King Mihai I of Romania. Before this episode, some references must be made to the context in which Bert Whitley was recruited in the S.O.E network in Romania, led by Major Ivor Porter.

The exact date of the first encounter between the author and Captain (later Major) Porter is not clearly stated, but it appears from the recollection of the events that it happened at the time of the evacuation of Anglo-American prisoners of war from Popești airfield between 31 August and 3 September 1944. Whitley heard about the mission to evacuate Americans from Martin Horovitz, and, together with D. Calvert, left for the airfield to return home. Their encounter with Captain Porter is recalled with the feelings associated to the challenging event: "Doug Calvert and I were naturally happy at the prospect of going home, and were patiently waiting for our flight. Then, from almost nowhere, appeared a British Army Captain, who turned out to be an Agent, a member of S.O.E. at that. He came up to us and without any preamble asked: *Will you stay in Romania with me and help with Radio?* We were young and keen. Keen to help the war effort. Immediately we replied *Yes*, and that's all there was to it. This chappie introduced himself as Captain Porter, and took us with him, back to Bucharest by car."[4]

The activity of Major Ivor Porter is connected to S.O.E. actions in Romania. Agents of the organization had been active in Romania since 1939, the central figure was Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred George Gardyne de Chastelain, who took over the command of the Romanian S.O.E. department in July 1940. The most important operation of the Romanian department at that time was to stop or considerably diminish the oil export to Germany by sabotaging transportation by water and railroad, and even of the oil wells and refineries.[5] Towards the end of 1943, when the Romanian side had taken steps to leave the war, S.O.E. initiated the operation Autonomous to contact,

[1] Ibid., 121–122.
[2] Short names given by the pilots to German bombers Junkers Ju-88 and Junkers Ju-87 Stuka.
[3] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 124.
[4] Ibid., 127.
[5] National Archives London, HS 7-186, History of the S.O.E. in Romania 1939–1944, 1–4

inform and assist the Romanian opposition teamed around Iuliu Maniu in their attempts to get Romania out from the Axis countries. After two failed attempts, they succeeded for the third time to land by parachutes on 21 December 1943. The members of the operation, A.G.G. de Chastelain, Ivor Porter and Silviu Meţianu, were captured 12 hours after landing in the area of Plosca village, Teleorman County and transported to Bucharest, where they were imprisoned until 23 August 1944.[1]

In the context of the events of 23 August 1944, the three British officers were taken directly to the Palace, where the King discussed with the leader of the operation the measures to be taken against the Germans.[2] Since the attempt to contact S.O.E. Istanbul by radio on the night of 23/24 August failed, Lt.-Col. de Chastelain left aboard an aeroplane to Turkey, while Captain Porter stayed in Romania to organize the network of transmissions. These events are also mentioned in Porter's memoirs, as it was considered very important to set up radio connection with Istanbul for getting instructions and request bomber operations against the Germans for a successful *coup d'état*.[3]

Once the contact with the S.O.E. Cairo station had been set up, Porter organized information transmission to the centre. The experts in transmission who operated the radio station were recruited among R.A.F. personnel who had just been freed from captivity. One member of the S.O.E. team was Silvia Placa, "a young English woman married to a Romanian",[4] who was, together with her husband, also an agent, Whitley's host during his stay in Romania: "Captain Porter introduced me to Sylvia and Mircea Placa, who had kindly invited me to stay with them in their home. Doug [Calvert] was put up with a White Russian couple, refugees from 1917 Russian Revolution..."[5]

The visit to the Royal Palace is also described in the same fashion, the author does not point out the date, only states that it happened the night after the last evacuations of the American prisoners, which places it most probably to 4 September 1944. He was accompanied to the Palace by Major Porter and an unknown high ranking Romanian officer; the entire visit seemed like an adventure: "We walked through the unlit streets of Bucharest, then eventually up Calea Victoriei, wherein lies the Palace. To me this was a rather thrilling and exciting journey, not only because we were going to see the King but because everything about the journey had the air of a clandestine adventure."[6] Whitley saw the meeting with the king a "momentous occasion", which gave him the opportunity to make some observations about King Mihai I: "We waited only a few moments before King Michael entered the room, walked towards us and spoke to Major Porter. Knowing little of Romania's Monarchy at the time, I was amazed to see how very young looking the King was. An upright young men. The two of them talked awhile, then I was introduced. The King shook hands with me, wished me good luck and before leaving us, authorised me to draw sufficient funds from the National

[1] Ibid., 11–12.
[2] Ibid., note of Lt. Col. E.G. Boxshall about S.O.E. activities in Romania, vi.
[3] Ivor Porter, *Operation Autonomous. With S.O.E. in Wartime Romania* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), 285.
[4] Ibid., 296.
[5] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 127.
[6] Ibid., 128.

Bank with which to re-equip myself and to be subsistence during my stay in the country."[1]

Being an agent in 1944 Bucharest eased Whitley's access to Romanian society and realities, and he noted some very interesting aspects as to his brief experiences in Soviet occupied Romania. The S.O.E. group led by Major Porter was primarily **responsible** to insure the flux of information to the Mediterranean centre. This activity took up most of the transmitters' time, as they also had to adapt to the transmission procedures based on new frequencies and indicatives: Porter was not able to brief us on what frequency band we should be searching for contact. Neither Dog nor myself (operating as gunners recently) had worked Central Mediterranean radio stations and knew not the likely frequencies."[2]

Although Major Porter's memoirs contain no evidence of his two subordinated British officers' activity, their recruitment and tasks are also mentioned, in addition to Whitley's memoirs, in Douglas Calvert's diary. The first note on Captain Porter is on 28 August 1944: "In the afternoon, Captain Brian Bird and I drove to town in taxi to see the British Intelligence Officer. Went to hospital and then to H.Q. (Banca Nationale). Captain Porter not there, so waited down in basement where Radio boys were working...At last Captain Porter arrived. Had a talk with him and he explained our situation."[3] Bert Whitley is also mentioned in the context of meetings with Major Porter; Calvert also notes that the two of them worked for Porter: "30 August - Go to town to see Captain Porter who has moved to a new place, so have to take tram which is very, very crowded. Meet Bert Whitley and go out to lunch with various officials and one typist... 31 August - During the next six weeks Bert Whitley and I worked under Captain Porter of British Intelligence and saw something of Bucharest and Romania generally..."[4]

Apart from their job, the agents also had enough spare time to be able to get in contact with the elite of Bucharest society, with its strong pro-western core. In his memories, Whitley revealed the ways of spending his spare time: visiting the Horovitzes, debating various subjects with his new hosts, the Placas, and attending the parties organized by a group of friends where he was introduced by a certain Dan Hurmuzescu. An interesting thing about the walks and especially the parties is the abundance that Whitley remarked in several fragments; the caviar, a delicacy, was a constant ingredient of the menu: "I was pleased to be introduced to one Dan Homosescu, a well off eligible batchelor (*sic!*) of high society. He, such a nice fellow, befriended me, and as opportunity presented, introduced me, in turn, to many people, friends of his, in the city...I well remember his first treat. He took me to some posh club where we sat and chatted, in French, until the dish he had ordered arrived. We had fresh caviar, from the Black Sea, heaped on buttered biscuits and taken with sips of tsuica, a liqueur plum brandy (a national drink)... we usually ended up at the home of one or another of his friends, for a late morning bite of Caviar, always taken with tsuica."[5]

---

[1] Ibid.
[2] Ibid., 130.
[3] Patrick Macdonald, *Through Darkness to Light,* 271.
[4] Ibid.
[5] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 133–134.

Because of the restrictions of the curfew introduced by the occupant Soviet authorities, the parties were usually held at the homes of any of the members of this group, lasting till morning, in order to avoid night walks and Soviet patrols. The description of these parties reveals the wealth of the upper class; Whitley was surprised by the diversity and plenty of the courses served: "The food at parties, wherever held, was both sumptuous and plentiful. Caviar was usually the hors-d'oeuvre. In war torn Romania can you imagine sitting down to a main course of SUCKLING PIG, with all the trimmings? I can, and did! I knew, however, that the educated rich in Bucharest lived a life as different as chalk and cheese, from the frugal existence of the ignorant peasants in the hinterland."[1]

The plentiful meals served in Romania during the war was a recurrent topic in the few memoirs analyzed, in comparison probably with the rationing and scarcity of food on the British market. Ivor Porter also remarked, repeatedly, the abundance of parties and the diversity of food available on the Romanian market: "Over Christmas and New Year there were parties; at a particularly splendid one, given by a member of the passport office and his beautiful Polish wife, we had caviar,vodka, pheasants, champagne, gypsy musicians, dancing and Russian songs…The food was wonderful and was still plentiful if you were reasonably well of. Even caviar from the Danube delta hardly seemed a luxury… We had no meatless days. The markets were full of unrationed food. We were each allowed a bottle of wine a day with ţuica or şpriţ as an apéritif, and fruit and white cheese on squares of bread. Wartime Romanians had far better food than most of their neighbours."[2]

The Soviet troops in Bucharest and the author's interaction with them is another interesting aspect of the memoirs; their numbers and stern looks were impressive: "Russian soldiers were everywhere, as usual. To have so many troops patrolling the city continuously, it was evident that Russia had no shortage of man power. A good number of the soldiers, perhaps even a majority, were mongolians *(sic!)*, round faced and severe looking....By this time I was quite used to numbers of Russian soldiers, all carrying rifles, who were patrolling the streets everywhere, with several, sort of standing guard, at every road junction. Romanians were afraid of them..."[3]

The opportunity to return home showed itself at the end of October, when an R.A.F. Wing Commander came to Romania with the duty to organize the British Military Commission in Bucharest.[4] Before he left Romania, Whitley took it as his honourable duty to visit the graves of his comrades who had died in May. Doug Calvert and a Romanian major accompanied him in his travel; the graves were found in the courtyard of the village church, taken care of by the villagers. "The rest of my crew had been buried there, with crosses erected over graves and with flowers on each of them. It was a beautiful church in a lovely setting. Trees and shrubs in the graveyard, all very tidily kept, were surrounded in part by an old stone wall and some fencing, which contained the church yard."[5]

---

[1] Ibid., 136.
[2] I. Porter, *Operation Autonomous...*, 90, 172, 305.
[3] B. Whitley, *Benghazi to Bucharest*, 133–134.
[4] Ibid., 137.
[5] Ibid., 138.

When he heard the news of his imminent return home, Whitley said good bye to the two families who hosted him in Bucharest, and the friends that he had spent good time with in his spare hours. The author also mentions the sad separation from one of the girls (Viorica Iliescu) who had been introduced to him at the parties, and for whom it seems he had some feelings; her family tried to persuade, and even bribe him to take her to England with himself. Another episode, recalled with the title "Unpleasant duty", is about the uncovering of a German agent, who was also part of the group of friends in Bucharest where Homoşescu had introduced him. She tried to hand him over some jewellery that she had gained during her espionage for the Germans, as she knew she was going to be arrested, but the author refused. Also, Whitley reported to the British Mission the details and address where the agent could be identified.

The precise date of the departure is not mentioned, only that Whitley left Romania with D. Calvert sometime at the end of November 1944, aboard a transportation aircraft DC 3 Dakota, heading Bari, Italy, where the two ex-prisoners were warmly welcomed by the rest of their crew. After a short rest in Italy they returned to Great Britain with a maritime convoy, arriving at Gourock port, from where they were taken to London for debriefing to the Air Ministry. After these formalities, the author had a 28-day leave to recover, and arrived home to his family on Christmas Eve, 1944. During his leave, he saw after his duty of honour for his former, deceased comrades, visiting their families to inform them about their fatal mission and give them photographs about their graves. When he returned to service, in January 1945, Whitley was promoted to the rank of lieutenant, and at the end of the war he was working at the Wigton, Cumberland R.A.F. base.

The last part of the manuscript discusses the post-war period, the author mentions his marriage plans, his employment with the British Overseas Airways Corporation, and his job as communications officer within it. His passion for flying and the new job took him to the most distant parts of the world; he mentioned destinations such as Cyprus, Rabat, Lida, Tel-Aviv, Karachi, Singapore, Johannesburg, Sydney. Eventually, with the development of aeronautic industry and especially long-distance communication means, transmission officers were no longer needed on board of civil aeroplanes, so Whitley resigned, not unregretfully, his post as radio officer, and got into sales business, managing a post office and a grocery store in North Yorkshire, together with his wife.

A memorable episode described is the assistance given to the Horovitz family, his protectors in the summer of 1944, who had to emigrate because of being persecuted by the communists. Their re-encounter is an opportunity for great joy: "what a happy, and in the same time tearfull *(sic!)* reunion it was. This was Mid-Summer 1957 - I had last seen my brave helpers in Bucharest in 1944, thirteen years ago."[1] The manuscript ends with notes about the lasts active years of the author: the appearance of supermarkets determined him again to change his profession, and he became the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce in Huddersfield. The family moved to the town of Adel, Leeds, where his daughters attended the Lawnswood High School for Girls, and his wife resumed her career as an operator at British Telecom. After years of activity with many satisfactions, Bert Whitley retired and moved to his wife's birth place,

[1] Ibid., 157.

Scarborough. The concluding line contains the author's positive attitude, as all throughout the manuscript: "I conclude that the retirement is the best job I have had. Never a dull moment and so much to do."[1]

To conclude, it can be stated that Pilot Officer Whitley's memoirs offer a subjective perspective on the war, starting from his personal motivation in joining the army ("to serve the king and the country") to his release from prison, when he chose once again to be faithful to his option at enrolment and stay under arms in a foreign country. The author's convictions and his personality traits, which helped him through the difficult moments of the war, can be detected throughout the manuscript, especially in the hardest times of the imprisonment. In his case the war played an important part in broadening his vision, perceivable in the first place in the descriptions of places and people he got in contact with as a prisoner and agent, first in Africa, then in Eastern Europe.

For Romanian readers this manuscript is particularly important as it paints a picture of Romanian society in the years of the war. The pages dedicated to the period he spent in this country display a generally positive image of the Romanians, peasants and intellectuals alike, as well as the picturesque rural area and the Romanian village. The "little Paris" (Bucharest) is also described as an impressive place with large boulevards, majestic buildings and green areas everywhere, and also because of the wealth of the elite in a period when the greatest part of the continent had to face rationing and all kinds of wartime privations. The nicest memories are connected to the people he met in this period, especially the Horovitzes, with whom he remained in friendly relations all his life.

Apart from all these, the memoirs have an incontestable inner value, as the recollection of a destiny intersecting with "great history", presenting to the reader an anonymous fighter who lived the traumatic experience of WW2 and who considered important to share it at his old age with others. Making this manuscript publicly accessible would be a double gain: 1. the historiography of this genre would be enriched by a valuable volume of memories helping to better understand the perception of the war in general, and the experience of imprisonment in particular; 2. the publication of the manuscript would also fulfil the author's wish and justify all the work that he had done writing his memoirs.

Translated by Emese Czintos

[1] Ibid.,159.