

The breeze caught his parachute and kept it half open on top of the water, for a while towing him towards the shore. Five seconds finished that, however, and down it went, leaving him drifting in the water. He began to curse the Mae West which wouldn't keep his head out of the water until he remembered that he had to pull the handle to inflate it.

"Wonder what else I've forgotten to do," he thought, not even knowing how or when he had pulled the rip cord of his parachute. Not even remembering finding his parachute, clipping it on, or going through the hatch.

Suddenly he did remember the whistle on his battle-dress collar. It was put there for this occasion, wasn't it? Blow it and see if any of the others are around.

Putting the whistle to his mouth, he was puzzled to find that his teeth were missing. Then he knew what caused that whack under the chin. His parachute had been hooked on one side only and the cross strap had caught the front of his neck and chin, scraped off a fair amount of skin, knocked out his lower dentures and cracked his top plate.

Now, under these circumstances, anyone who could live in the water and laugh and laugh must be completely hysterical. After a while he calmed down and watched as the raid continued and the last of the Lancasters headed for England.

All was quiet and Dack now had time to think. Think about home and family. Think about his fiancée. Think about the 21st birthday party just before he left Australia, and of the shockproof, waterproof watch his parents gave him. "Wonder what the time is," he thought. However, like the teeth — so the watch. Where it should have been was a great gaping wound. Hysteria set in again, but mercifully not for long, as oblivion took over . . .

It was quite a shock for him to slowly return to the land of the living in a nice warm room, alongside a roaring fire, with a young blonde medical orderly in a green German uniform, who offered him a cigarette and some cognac. It was now 2000 hours.

The orderly left the room and returned with a Captain, also in German uniform, who said in quite acceptable English: "Ah, Australian, where do you come from?"

Forgetting all about the number, rank and name thing, Dack said "Melbourne". "Ah," said the Captain, "I know it well, I worked at Yallourn for two years installing the Briquette Plant." He continued "You are the pilot, Yes? We picked you up in a small boat. We have shot the rest of your crew."

The next day, Dack was told that he was to be taken to the "rest of his crew".

The "rest of the crew", however, turned out to be only two, Jimmy McWilliam and Lofty Lee, who both parachuted on to land. However, Cy Borsht and four members of his crew were also there.

None of them knows who was first home.

Brian "Snowy" O'Connell,

Navigator of Cy Borsht's crew, shot down Flushing, 4 pm on 23.10.44.

Snowy managed to bail out safely from a kite which was shot down over Walcheran — an Island which we "sank" some time ago. He landed in some four feet of water with a few bits of flak in his person but otherwise unhurt — and as the Jerries were still in possession of the Island, kept

himself as much out of sight as possible until he was discovered by a friendly Dutchman, who rowed him out to an old barn which was sitting out by itself in the middle of the inundation caused by our breaching of the dykes.

His companions were four Italians, escapees from a Labour Gang, who were also hiding from the Germans. All they had to eat were some tinned peas presumably left behind by the Germans when they hurriedly left for less damp parts. This was a pretty unsatisfactory diet — but Snowy accepted it with a fairly good grace, knowing that the British were bound to take the Island fairly soon. Not so the Italians, who for some time had been glaring out of hungry eyes at three other refugees — some Netherlandish cats — who shared the shelter. The skinning and eating of these by the Italians, Snowy described as perhaps the most unnerving episode of the whole business.

He finally escaped — scrounged some army battledress (his own being in rags) and after being evacuated through various channels eventually reached England.

24/25th October, 1944. Ops to Brunswick; very elaborate electronic counter measures to confuse the German nightfighters were used. 152 tons H.E., 847 tons incendiaries. No cloud, and a very successful attack. No losses from Waddington, but one 463 aircraft badly damaged by incendiaries falling from above — the navigator was badly injured and later died.

No news at base yet re Johnny Dack, but my team were still asking any crews they could find if they saw them in trouble. I got a new Lancaster to replace 'P' Peter today, or at least a bloody old u/s bastard from Bardney with 400 hours up, LM582, it was a dreadful aircraft for my overworked team to get serviceable. They were still feeling the loss of Dack's crew, so now I had to pull rank to get it done.

26th October, 1944. Raining very heavy all day, but had to test fly the old aircraft received yesterday, for four hours in pouring rain. I had several pages of test notes on repairs to be done, and I was glad I didn't have to fly ops in this old horror.

28th October, 1944. Ops tonight, Bergen in Norway. The pilot had trouble with old 'P', the swing to port was excessive under a bomb load and he ran off the runway and was bogged, so could not go. Fog descended before their return so all aircraft were diverted, some to Fiskerton to land by FIDO (Fog Investigation Dispersal Operation), a very expensive system.

While working all night to recover 'P', some clot pinched my bicycle, so to add to my troubles with the rotten aircraft, I now had to walk

30th October, 1944. Ops daylight to Walcheren, 3½ hours. Bomb load 14,000lbs H.E. gun positions; no losses on ops but one a/c crashed on return. I went on nine days leave — caught up with sleep and grog.

1st November, 1944. 463/467 sent 36 Lancasters in daylight to attack the oil plant at Meerbeck near Homberg, markers were covered by cloud and a timing discrepancy upset the plan. Only one aircraft attacked, the rest brought their bombs back. Six Lances of 463 and eleven of 467 were flak damaged.

2/3rd November, 1944. Ops to Dusseldorf, a heavy and successful attack. Two aircraft lost from Waddington.

6/7th November, 1944. Attack on the Mittelland canal at Gravenhorst, but unsuccessful due to heavy cloud, 463 lost three a/c — NF990, NG191 and NG256.