

F/O Sweeney was cited for a D.F.C. and it was awarded.

**27/28th September, 1944.** Ops to Kaiser Lautern — a heavy fire raid, 75 tons H.E., 810 tons incendiaries. 463 lost PB263.

Received a new JO.P today to replace the a/c lost 23/24th September. My team were very pleased with it, it was equipped with the latest H2S and we had several days flying with crew training, and were able to effect all minor adjustments to the satisfaction of the crew.

**5th October, 1944.** Ops early morning, 4 a.m. take-off. Target Wilhelmshaven. The crew of JO.P were very confident in the new a/c and joked about taking the Germans their breakfast in bed! They returned after five hours and reported the new H2S very effective. 467 lost one aircraft ditched in the sea; we received no report of the crew.

**6th October, 1944.** Ops again this morning, Bremen, before daylight. Return at dawn — no losses, but my new aircraft was now a veteran. We had several bullet holes to patch and it was late in the night before we finished.

**8th October, 1944.** Ops were on, but cancelled before take-off. I had another new aircraft, 'Q' Queenie — my hard pressed team were now servicing three aircraft with the normal manpower to service one. I asked the Flight Commander for a crew to test fly it, so F/O Perry and crew, myself and an armorer took it up. It behaved very badly, visibility was very poor and the propeller feathering did not work satisfactorily — we operated one and the wrong prop feathered; I checked the control panel and found a piece of metal dropped behind it in manufacture — so that was the gremlin. We were able to get the engine going and return. Again my hard-working men must recheck everything. The price of safety in the air is constant vigilance on the ground.

**11th October, 1944.** Daylight ops — take off 12.30 pm. All returned by 4 pm.

**12th October, 1944.** Fitters, armorers, bomb crews and fuel men worked all day; we were pressed for time so much that meals were cut short, only to have the show cancelled at dark.

**14th October, 1944.** Ops tonight, target Brunswick, without loss, but the weather was bad.

**19/20th October, 1944.** Ops on to Nuremberg following a daylight raid by the USAAF. No losses from 463 or 467 Sqdn.

**23rd October, 1944.** War on in daylight to Walcheran Island, take-off 2 pm, and bad luck, lost Johnny Dack and crew on his 33rd op, his last of his first tour, in my new 'P' Peter, NF977. Johnny Dack and two of the crew survived (P.O.W.). Also lost Cy Borsht and crew from 'A' Flight, 463 Sqdn, NF989. Cy and some of his crew were taken P.O.W. The Navigator, Snowy O'Connell, evaded capture. (A brief description of his escape is on a later page.

### **OPS. WALCHERAN, 23 OCTOBER, 1944.** AS SEEN BY JOHNNY DACK

"The Canadian Army has reached the South Bank of the Estuary of the River Scheldt. The Germans are firing across the five-mile-wide river from the Island of Walcheran. Your target for today is the dyke surrounding the Island. You will climb to 8000 feet and cross the channel descending to

4000 feet at the target area. On no account are you to go below 4000 feet. The weather is bad as you know. You will go to your aircraft and take-off when the green flare is fired. There will be seven Squadrons operating, going in at five-minute intervals. You are first on target. Dack, as it is the last trip of your tour, you will lead the Squadron. Good luck, fellows."

Wing Commander Bill Forbes finished the briefing and the crews got together and boarded the flight buses to the dispersal area.

"Hey Baron, we'll still beat you back," came a voice from 'A' Flight bus. It was Cy Borscht, that notorious "first homer!" Cy and his crew were a very experienced crew from 'A' Flight, 463 Squadron.

And so the crews went to their aircraft to await the lifting of the weather and the firing of the green flare signalling take-off.

Time dragged. The crew of 463 Sqdn 'B' Flight, Lancaster Bomber 'P' Peter talked about the celebration dinner arranged for that night at the Horse and Jockey pub in the village of Waddington. There would be no more stand-bys, no more briefing, no more wondering "where to tonight!". They also thought about the wisdom of sending black-painted, night-flying Lancasters on a 4,000 feet daylight, but they were experienced so they didn't think too deeply about it.

"Hey Skip, isn't that the Flight Commander's car coming around to us?" asked one of the crew.

Squadron Leader Des Sullivan had some very important news for the crew of 'P' Peter.

"Target's been changed, Dack," he said. "You are now going to bomb four artillery guns set up in the Town of Flushing on the Island. Time on target is 1600 hours. Oh, and by the way, the tour has just been cut from 33 to 30, so you are finished whether you go or not."

The weather cleared a little and the green flare was fired at last. The Lancasters of 463 Squadron took off and climbed away into the low cloud.

Jimmy Maple, the Navigator of 'P' Peter, was most experienced and efficient, the crew knew that they would be at the target at 4,000 ft. at exactly 1600 hours, and that they would drop their bombs and turn for home and celebration, so they were all able to do their jobs calmly and well.

"Start descending to 4,000 feet, Skip."

"O.K."

"Ten minutes to target, Skip."

"O.K. Jim."

"Target coming up straight ahead in two minutes, Skip."

"O.K. Jim, can't see the ground yet though."

The cloud base was below 4,000 ft, but not much. The sudden urgent voice of Bob Coward, the mid-upper gunner, screamed through the intercom. "There's cannon shells coming up all around us, Skip."

Before he had finished the sentence, the aircraft had been hit, was on fire, full of thick choking, burning, yellow-brown smoke, and without intercom. No one heard the skipper order them to abandon the aircraft, but they knew they had to go. Jimmy McWilliam, the bomb aimer, opened the front hatch and went out, followed by Lofty Lee, the Flight Engineer.

The Skipper was about to go, when through the haze and daze he realised he did not have a parachute. Lofty had forgotten to clip it on the skipper's harness for him.

Suddenly he felt a whack under the chin which awakened him from his daze, he looked down, saw the water of the River Scheldt, and he was in it. About 200 yards away, further out to sea, 'P' Peter hit the water and disappeared in the spray.

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