This account is based on the notes my father wrote soon after World War Two ended, and on what he told me when I was a youth.

My father was a navigator/bomb aimer in a Lancaster bomber flying over Germany in World War II. When there was flak (anti-aircraft fire) he kept the end of his parachute’s ripcord in his mouth, so that if he needed to find the ripcord he could find it easily.

The plane was hit. He writes:

“*Explosion. Perspex dome in front of aircraft disappeared. Aircraft turned over and over alternatively throwing me into the gun turret and onto the floor. Fixed to floor by gravitational effect for some time. Made my way out of front of aircraft - very confused about this and do not remember pulling ripcord of parachute.*”

Then,

“*Dreamt I was in bed and couldn*’*t breathe. Tried to wake myself by pinching the calf of my leg. No feeling of pinch. My next thought was that I had fallen out of bed onto the floor and I could breathe again.*”

When he recovered he found himself lying on his back in a snow covered field with his parachute still attached.

“*Decided to hide parachute. Dam nearby so I threw it into the dam. Would not sink as dam was frozen. Pulled parachute off dam and hid it in a ditch at the side of the field. Observed a small hut and a haystack nearby. Crawled into haystack. Stayed a few days. Coud not eat emergency rations as they made me ill. I heard people talking and moving about in daytime. Could not observe as I could not move.*”

And,

“*Decided to walk to Holland (in case I was not already there) i.e. West. Found I could not walk upright, only stagger, so knocked and whistled at the hut. Door opened by German soldier who had 2 girl helpers - night spotting post. Girls very kind and washed my hands and face for me. Soldier rang an airfield.*”

While they waited for the Luftwaffe to arrive they took him to the girls’ home nearby, to their parents, who fed him a huge meal of six eggs, though his tongue still hurt. (I still remember his smile as he told me how much he enjoyed the eggs.) The family managed to tell my father that their son was a Prisoner of War in England. He was being well treated, and they were so grateful for that. Thus, they were happy to treat my father well.

At some point in this ordeal my father looked in a mirror. The whites of his eyes were completely red, and his tongue was swollen.

“*I could not move my tongue for some days and it was swollen and very painful for some weeks.*”

And,

“*Both ears bleeding internally - treated myself with powdered sulfa drug.*’

When my father told me his story he suggested that the explosion in the plane had forced his tongue down his throat. At some point he was thrown from the plane and he had instinctively pulled his ripcord, and then became semi-conscious. Choking on his tongue prompted him to dream he was in bed unable to breathe, and when he hit the ground he was heavily winded, and the air inside his lungs blew his tongue out again.

That was his guess as to what happened, anyway.

The Luftwaffe took him away to an airfield and placed him under guard.

“*Then taken to Frankfurt for interrogation - cold cell, one blanket and 2 slices of black bread and a cup of clear soup per day - estimated time two weeks stay, with interrogations every few days.*

They took all his possessions, including his watch. Each day they gave him only water and rye bread. (He enjoyed rye bread for the rest of his life.) They kept asking him questions but all he told them was his name, rank and serial number. (As you do.)

When about two weeks had elapsed they told him his home address, the school he had gone to, and many other facts about him (that I can’t remember). They told him they knew he wasn’t a spy.

In other words, with regards to infiltrating the Australian Armed Forces, the German spy network was superb.

“*Interrogating officer felt sorry for me so sent me to a nearby hospital for some days, where my eyes were bandaged the whole time.*”

And,

“*Then various trucks, railway vans, jails, forced marches, sleeping in the open under very wet conditions, etc. to P.O.W. camp.*”

He wasn’t in that P.O.W camp for long. The allies were advancing, so he and the other prisoners were marched to other P.O.W camps. (Presumably, vehicles were in short supply for that job.)

Each march took days. During a march, the prisoners often went in search of animals they could kill, cook and eat. Cats, for example. The guards let them. (I don’t know where the prisoners slept.)

One time, some Hitler youths appeared with guns. They mocked the prisoners and were about to shoot them. The guard told them not to, warning them that if they tried, he would shoot them. He explained that the prisoners were under his guard, and his orders were to deliver them. He would shoot anyone who tried to prevent him from completing his task.

Months later he was in a P.O.W camp for airmen, Stalag Luft VI. That camp served as England’s Royal Airforce school for Prisoners of War! That school provided educational facilities for all Empire airmen interned in Germany. Materials were supplied by the British Red Cross Society. The school had over 1,000 students. The prisoners had a big choice of courses to choose from.

The Germans gave my father his possessions back, including his watch! Their bookwork was meticulous.

The war was ending. My father wrote (not long after he returned to Australia), “*The camp guards were ordered to go with the S.S. to defend Moosburg. Most refused, and at least six were shot by the S.S. The camp was then unguarded and open, and we all walked out looking for food. We raided local farms for fowls, pigs, which we killed and ate*.”

For some reason, my father and his mates inspected the officers’ quarters. They found egg shells in the dustbin, and more under the quarters, on the ground. The officers had been hiding the egg shells by pushing them through the cracks in the floor boards. The officers had been trading their men’s coffee for eggs. *Two cans coffee = one egg*, my father discovered. The nationality of the officers was hinted at in my father’s notes, but the truth is unclear. My father told me they were foolish as well, because they should have eaten the egg shells to get the calcium.

I’ll let Dad finish the story from the notes he took:

“*The next day, Patton*’*s Army came over the hill, and we were free. We were there for a week or so and then flown back to England in stages in transport planes, mostly Dakotas.”*