

E-Ernest 102 Squadron Mission 9 Target IJSSELMEER BAY, Gardening

PILOT Peter Pascoe Pilot Officer
FLIGHT ENGINEER Reg Chasuble Flying Officer
NAVIGATOR Cecil Cardew Flight Sgt
BOMB AIMER Gwyn Fairfax Flying Officer
WIRELESS/GUNNER Fraser Wilson Flight Sgt
MID UPPER GUNNER Henry Lane Flight Sgt
TAIL GUNNER Mitch Prism Flight Sgt

29th / 30th April 1942

FO Reg Chasuble, our new Flight Engineer has joined us just in time for our first "Gardening" mission. Reg was previously with 97 Squadron on Avro Manchesters. These were so unreliable that they spent more time on the ground than in the air and 97 Squadron is now known throughout the RAF as "the 97th Regiment of Foot". Seems a splendid chap with the most lugubrious expression who looks like a stuffed owl whenever he is the slightest bit squiffy. Having completed our good luck ritual by kissing the cookie, or in this case, one of the 9-foot-long mines in the bomb bay, we took up our positions and waited for the green light.

With a full moon and clear weather, we had a good take off without any rough engines this time and headed out over the North Sea with Kings Lynn off to Starboard. All systems seem to be on the top line and the crew are all in good spirits.

As we continue over the Dogger Bank there are no signs of enemy night fighters, but we have been warned to look out for friendly Mosquitos who might be in our general area. An anti-submarine patrol vessel sends out a challenge and we respond with the correct counter sign and being this low we can see the crew giving us a friendly wave of encouragement in the bright moonlight only occasionally obscured by the 5/10ths cloud cover.

As we get closer to the Dutch coast the cloud bubbles up and we have 10/10ths cover but luckily no recall. "Permission to drop a drift flare skipper as I am worried that this cross wind might be stronger than we were told."

"Permission granted Cecil. Doesn't seem to be any signs of bandits in the area."

"As I thought skipper can you steer 89 zero."

Thirty minutes later and with clear weather "Enemy coast in sight skipper. If we are going to avoid the flak on Texel Island steer 101 degrees now and then I'll give you a course correction to give us a run in to target."

"Damn and blast we've been picked up by the searchlights! Dropping to 1500 feet keep an eye on the sea as I don't want to end up in the drink."

Although we have shaken off the searchlights every time, I blink all I can see is a dark blue flash.

"Heavy flak ship directly ahead skipper. Now we're for it."

Despite the very heavy flak we only take one hit and that destroys the dinghy.

“Come round to 152 degrees and hold her steady at 1,500 feet. Speed 180mph. Now hold her at that.”

“Me110F4 attacking in a vertical dive.”

“Henry you’ll have to deal with him as I haven’t got enough height to try a corkscrew.”

Lady luck is with us for sure as our Mid Upper manages to get in a telling burst before the Hun can open fire and hits him in the fuel tank and although he manages a quick burst before breaking off he misses us by a country mile. We see him well alight trying to make a crash landing on the shore.

“Steady, steady, steady ... first one gone!” and then at three second intervals we drop each of the remaining mines. Even after the last one had gone we remained on a straight and level course just to confuse the enemy as to where we have actually planted all our vegetables.

Mitch our tail gunner pipes up. “Looked good! Slap bang in the middle of the shipping lane, skipper.”

“Turn on to 185 degrees for 12 minutes skipper.”

Luckily no more flak ships at the south end of the bay and no sign of the mighty Luftwaffe. “Steer 259 degrees and take us home skipper – watch out for the flak over the Hague should be off to port.”

5/10ths cloud as we approach the coast and the searchlights again fix upon us but with a bit of ducking and diving, we manage to shake them off. However, we are subjected to some moderate flak which hits us in the nose and port wing but only causes superficial damage in each case. As we fly out over the North Sea, we see a Dornier 217 J1 up between the clouds, but he completely fails to see us. “Break out the cocoa and sandwiches everyone.”

The cloud persists giving a dappled light over the steely grey sea. Two shapes are silhouetted against the overcast firing at each other and then as we get nearer, we can see that one is a Mosquito who is clearly getting the upper hand over a flying pencil.

Weather remaining good over our base and as we touch down and taxi round to dispersal, we have safely completed our first gardening sortie.

50% accuracy. No claims and no casualties.