

Steve Dixon's Target For Tonight online campaign
Mission 18 8/9th August 1944 Railyards at Dreux , France.

"... and the German Army is rapidly being encircled in the area around Falaise. Meanwhile Operation Totalize is in full swing. The 1st Polish Armored Division is attacking eastwards against the German 85th Infantry Division, while our bombers are attacking the Bretteville-sur-Laize, Haut-Mesnil, Cauvicourt and Saint-Sylvain sectors at South-east of Caen."

"Turn that damned radio off, Bill! I'm trying to write a letter to Maude explaining why I can't get home on leave."

That time waiting to go on an Op was the worst of times. Everyone was keyed up and had to find their own way of dealing with it. Some pretended to doze in an old battered leather armchair, some would read a tattered magazine for the 100th time, while others would try to listen to the radio.

Soon enough it was time for the briefing in the smoke filled hall. Waiting for the curtain to be drawn back. Please God, not Berlin or the Happy Valley tonight! But no, it was a railway yard in France. Weather report was quite good with a bit of cloud and maybe ground fog. 102 will be in the middle of the stream tonight so not too bad except it was a full bloody moon.

The crew of H Hotspur were flying their first sortie together but they were all experienced having served in other crews that were now broken up. Their aircraft for the evening was also an old workhorse showing their signs of several close encounters with flak and shell. But she would do her bit and get them there and back again – hopefully. All checks complete there was just the wait for the signal to go. It had been a warm summers day and inside the fuselage and in full flying gear it was hot and stuffy but that would soon change once they were airborne.

Out over the Suffolk coast and despite the clear skies they were leaving no contrails and no sign of enemy nightfighters.

"Test your guns." The aircraft shook as the eight guns spat their bullets into the night sky.

A little while later, "Enemy coast ahead. Looks like someone has caught a dose." Searchlights were probing the night sky. The master searchlight was blue and once it had fixed onto its prey the other hungrily picked out the unfortunate bomber. Flak opened up and it must have been hit in the bomb bay as a bright ball of fire blossomed in the night sky.

Pressing on, a Dornier 217 N2 tries a hit and run attack from 10.30 level scoring hits all over the shop but only one does any real damage rendering the nose guns inoperable. As the nightfighter completes his pass over the top of the Lancaster the MUG lets fly and the smoke erupts from the engine of the Dornier and oil splashes the Perspex dome but the German flies on into the darkness.

Nearing the target zone they can see that the pathfinders have done an outstanding job of marking the target and the lead bombers are plastering the marshalling yards and engine sheds without much collateral damage to the French houses beyond. A bit of light flak increases the ventilation inside H Hotspur but otherwise it is a clear run into the target. A bit of smoke and ground fog slightly obscuring the target but at least 50% of the bombs are on target.

"Good going, Ian." "Thanks, Skipper."

"FW190 ON OUR TAIL!" "All yours Tom!" Our four tail guns thunder out. "Look at that, wing torn right orf, flipping Nora." "Well done Tom."

"Stuff this. Let's go home."