

Target For Tonight – Steve Dixon online campaign Mission 11
Target Industry St Medard en Jalles, France 3rd/4th June 1944
Aircraft: Berlin Or Bust 102 Squadron

Even before the briefing we had known that it was going to be a long mission. We had seen how long the petrol bowsers took to refuel our crates. Berlin perhaps? So it was with some relief that at the briefing we saw that it was to be an industry target just north of Bordeaux. However, it wasn't all good news as 102 Squadron was going to be bringing up the rear of the bomber stream so they would definitely know that we were coming.

Weather forecast is patchy but at least it's set fair for take off and there is little or no moon. There was an air of expectancy – not just around the base -as if something big was about to happen. Soon after take off, somewhere over the River Nene, the weather closes in with 10/10ths cloud but no recall.

Despite close encounters with two nightfighters over Northern France we get off with only light damage to nothing too critical. They must have been low on either fuel or ammo having attacked the bomber stream in front of us because they both made a single pass before breaking off. However, just west of Poitiers we encounter flak but again only superficial damage but then a Ju88 G-7 hits us from 9 o'clock low damaging our control cables so badly that I am unable to execute any evasive actions. Just then Peter, my Flight Engineer, cops a packet and collapses onto my right arm. The dials are obscured by his blood and I have to push him off me so that I can control the crate. The rudder is feeling really heavy so I think we must have taken damage there too. As the Jerry comes round for a second pass from 6 high both the Rear and MUG blaze away and his entire tail section shears off and the two parts of the Ju spiral independently to earth.

"That's the ticket chaps! You gave him what for, alright. Jeff come up and have a shufti at Peter."
"Skipper time to change course. Steer 209, repeat 209." "Wilco."

"Sorry skipper, Peter's had it. Ruddy great hole in the back of his head."
"OK return to your position for the bomb run. 20 minutes from target."

Peter's gone west. We went through basic training together. What do I tell his parents?"

"Skipper, I have just had a met report from the pathfinders and wind speed is much stronger than forecast and there is 10/10ths cloud over target. Do we abort?"

"Not bloody likely! Not that we have come this far."
"They are using sky markers and H2S should give us a good fix on the target with the Gironde estuary showing really clearly."

"Right. Let's make this a good one for Peter."

Apart from a drop of flak it is an easy run into the target with no nightfighters present.

"Steady ... steady... steady ... BOMBS GONE." Keeping on track for the photo which isn't going to much kop with all this cloud, but anyway it is the done thing.

With all the difficulties with handling the old bus given the damage to the controls I see that we have drifted out over the Bay of Biscay through gaps in the cloud cover. "Alec I am going to steer due North and we should make landfall between Lorient and Nantes but I want to avoid all that flak

around the U boat base at Lorient so keep an eye on our position, there's a good chap and sing out if I drift too far West."

Time seems to have stood still. Peter has gone and his blood has frozen on the control panel.

"... can you hear me skipper? Turn to bearing 045 we are crossing the Brittany coast and need to stay away from the Channel Islands."

"Wilco."

"Skipper, this is Jeff. I have taken a look at the fuel gauges and I don't think that we are going to make it all the way back to base."

"Skipper, this is Alec. On this heading we can put down at the nightfighter station at Colerne if we let them know that we are coming."

"Sam, can you whistle them up and give them the gen. Oh and ask them nicely not to shoot us down please."

It is good to get out in then early morning air. Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning. Looks like 4th June is going to be a rough day.