

Target For Tonight Mission 12

Communication and Radar station at Aufevre, France 5/6th June 1944

Standing by the freshly dug grave of my Maude, my wife and Gwenie, my new born daughter in the rain along with 6 other families who lost wives and daughters when a minelaying Ju88 crashed into the maternity home in Skelmersdale Avenue having been hit by Ack Ack on its way to Harwich. I don't know how long I stood there, feeling empty but I know that was soaked through by the time Mum and Dad made me go home. There was a telegram waiting telling me to report to 102 Squadron immediately Best thing really, doing something rather than sitting in an empty house waiting for my new family never to come home.

In the briefing, so much excitement. This was it. The big one. The long awaited Second Front. We are going to put out of action the eyes and ears of the German Army. Well that's what the C.O. said. Precision is vital and with a full moon and 5/10ths cloud cover there was no excuse for missing the target. The crew of Berlin or Bust seem like a decent bunch of chaps. Done a few missions together but lost their Flight Engineer on the last sortie.

Good to be back on a show. Half an hour after take off I can just make out the Essex coast and home. Given everything that is happening tonight no sign of nightfighters which is just as well because as we cross the South coast the Channel is a mass of boats. An aircraft in the bomber stream is sending V in Morse. V for victory to the armada below. Best of British luck.

Near to the French coast and there is a thin sea mist shrouding the beaches. As we are in the middle of the bomber stream the target has already taken a bit of a pasting by the look of it. Smoke and dust partially obscure the target but there are plenty of T.I.s and Master Bomber is shepherding us slap bang on to the target and the old bus rears up like a stallion as the cookie and incendiaries are sent on the way.

Damn and blast we are caught by a ruddy searchlight and despite the skipper throwing us into a corkscrew dive we are taking hits all shop. The acrid smell of cordite fills the aeroplane and reports come in from each of the crew. First Jeff, the bombardier, "Nose turret is smashed and heat and oxygen are out." According to the instruments in front of me the Hydraulics are out so we can't close the bomb bay doors, landing gear and flaps are inoperable. Bomb bay has been taken hits but luckily we have just dropped our bombs. "Harry here skipper. My MUG turret is U S." "Bert here skipper we've a dirty great hole in the port rudder and the starboard rudder is just flapping in the wind. "Feather number 1 engine skipper before it runs out of control." I tell the skipper.

"Jeff move up to the centre section. I'm going to take her down to 9,000 feet just in case. Let's hang on and see if we can get the old bus home."

I do a walk round to see how bad the damage is and check on the chaps. Apart from several jagged holes in the fabric of the fuselage it looks like we might have a chance of getting home.

"Skipper, I recommend sticking on this course and making for Yeovil." "Thanks Alec. Yes, good plan."

Crossing back over the Channel if we did ditch in the sea I reckon you could probably walk back stepping from ship to ship. Just look at it! We are on our way. If only Maude and Gwennie could see it.