

Target for Tonight Steve Dixon's online campaign.
Mission 20 2/3rd March 1944
Target Berlin
102 Squadron G George

"Now then old chap, they tell me that you have had a bit of a rough time of late. Why don't you tell me all about it?"

Pilot Officer Geoffrey Flowers didn't answer the Quack immediately but looked out across the hospital lawns dotted with his fellow patients and their attendants. Everyone was being very kind but he knew that if he told them what was really going on inside his head.

Following the mission last month to Metz where I had returned with all his crew dead, dying or so badly wounded they would never fly again I was given a scratch crew of odds and sods. Some who had been survivors, like myself, some who had joined crews who were near the end of their tour of duty and one who was on his first posting.

We were given a couple of airworthiness flights to get accustomed to working together before being sent to the Big City – Berlin on our first real mission. As soon as we crossed the North Sea we hit trouble with searchlight coning us and flak bursting all around and hitting fuel tanks and wing roots, but nothing so bad as to make them turn back. Crossing into Germany we had 10/10ths cloud but the mission wasn't recalled. The Jerry nightfighters knew exactly where we were going and the searchlights lit up the clouds below so that we stood out like flies on a sheet. Bomber after bomber went down trailing flames and smoke.

In the target area the Jerries had aircraft dropping so many flares that it was like walking down Piccadilly before the blackout. Twice we were attacked but somehow managed to keep flying despite the damage. Then the bomb run itself with flak and Target Indicators trying to show us where to bomb through the 5/10ths cloud clover.

Turning for home we were attacked so many times I lost count then somewhere over Rotterdam a really persistent blighter, a Ju88 got in some really painful attacks which took out number 2 engine and ruptured our fuel tanks. That was when Brian, my Flight Engineer, told me that we didn't have enough fuel to make it back to Blighty even if I could keep her in the air.

Crossing the coast I gave the crew the code word for ditching, "Dinghy, dinghy, dinghy!" and they kicked out the escape hatches. Our Sparks, Hugh sent out our position and requested help and those that could braced themselves behind the main spar.

The sea had a moderate swell and I could just about make out the English coast on the horizon before we hit one wave top, then another before the crate shuddered to a full stop and then it was get out as fast as I can. Out on the wing and Chris had a line and was pulling the inflated dinghy towards us. "All aboard the skylark, once around the bay."

The next 30 hours are a bit of a blank, I just remember being cold and thirsty and seasick. We used whatever we could to bail out including our flying helmets. We took it in turns to crank the Gibson Girl emergency transmitter. We had all made it out mostly unscathed but the chaps were losing hope when eventually we were spotted and picked up by the Air Sea Rescue launch and given a mug of hot Bovril laced with Rum. They took us back to Harwich.

"Sorry, Sir. Miles away. Nothing to tell sir. Piece of cake."