

Target for Tonight Steve Dixon online campaign
102 squadron B Bobby
Mission 14 23/24 June 1942
Target Bremen

The chaps are in good spirits for tonight's mission which is mainly over water and having seen how effective Monica is at giving us a warning of enemy nightfighters. "Hermit" Crabbe or tail gunner has removed the perspex panel so that he can get an unobstructed view of any Huns with evil intent. To prevent frostbite he has lathered his face with some concoction of his own from various animal fats on top of which he is wearing a balaclava and several scarves. Here on the ground on a glorious early summer's morning he must be absolutely sweltering. Robby our navigator and Jack our wireless operator are singing their pre-flight ditty which has become as much of the ritual as pulling on Fat Hermann. This one sounds like Lili Marlene

*"Coming out of briefing
Get into the kites
Down the bloody runway,
And off into the night.
We've left the flarepath far behind,
It's bloody dark but never mind,
We're pressing on regardless
For the Wingco's DFC."*

Our new CO is not highly regarded by the squadron who have nicknamed him "Francois" as he only flies the easy French targets when he flies at all and yet he carpets any Early Returners with mechanical faults and threatens them with a charge of LMF (Lacking Moral Fibre).

Finally we get the green light and B Bobby lifts off into a dark pink East Anglian summer sunset. Heading for the assembly point off the coast of Great Yarmouth we can just catch sight of the Wellington Squadron heading out over the North Sea as the sun finally disappears over the horizon.

Out over the Dogger Bank a bit of cloud brews up and I am relieved to see that we are not streaming the tell tale contrails as the enemy radar will have undoubtedly picked us up by now. So it's no surprise when Jimbo calls out "Bandit at 10.30 high!" as he opens fire but is unable to hit the Me110G4 which hits the starboard wing taking out the dinghy and causes some superficial damage before flying off into the night. No real harm done.

Further out to sea the cloud breaks up and below is a bank of fog. There is a belt of extreme cold at our altitude. "Check your guns everyone. Jack check out the ventral gun." All the gunners call in to say that their guns are working . Despite the cold no contrails.

"Navigator to Pilot. Texel Islands off to starboard change course to 71 degrees skipper. I think that the cold may have affected our Gee set but it's champion now skipper."

10/10ths cloud sets in north of Leeuwarden but no recall so things will hopefully clear up nearer the target. "Robby how is our course looking?" "No problems skipper, although we are almost out of Gee range I've got a good fix and we should be bang on target." Still no sign of nightfighters – perhaps there is a good flick on at the Kinema tonight?

“New heading of 51 degrees skipper to avoid the flak batteries on Heligoland.” The cloud clears and below us is the fog bound coast of Germany. GeeGee spots a Dornier 217J1 at 12 low and opens fire hitting his port wing. Jack is manning the ventral gun and gets some more hits on his other wing. This has clearly upset the poor chap as his own shots are way off target. Then to add insult to injury Hermit opens up with the tail guns rupturing the poor chap’s fuel tank and he explodes shedding bits of his kite all over the Fatherland. “Jolly well done Hermit. He’s definitely gone for a Burton!”

“Course change to 144 degrees skipper.” “Enemy coast ahead. Decoy fires burning – buckets of smoke.” “Change course on to 168 degrees skipper.” The shrill tones of the Monica warning tells us that we have something on our tail. Jimbo is the first to spot him “6 high chaps.” He and Hermit brew up the Hun’s fuel tank and tear off his tail at the same time. “Good shooting chaps.” Course change 58 degrees for bomb run skipper.” Bremen is already in flames and the ground fog combined with the smoke look like the glorious sunset that we saw as we set out from base earlier this evening but on the ground as if the world really has been turned upside down. On the run in we only see light flak none of which comes near enough to cause us any problems. “Target mostly obscured skipper.” “Do you want me to go round again?” “Don’t think that it will make any difference skipper I can’t see anything through the smoke and fog. I’ll have to use dead reckoning from that last fix. I can see some explosions I will use those as an aiming point.Bombs gone!” More light flak on the way out of the target zone but again nothing to trouble us.

Against the glare of the burning city the silhouette of a twin engined kite crosses from port to starboard. Might have been a Wellington but then I noticed that it has twin tail fins so probably an Me110. Cork-screwed just in case he sees us. Then we are back out over the sea again and on our way home.

“Turn on to 270 degrees skipper.” Back into 10/10ths cloud no sign of the enemy.

Cloud base begins to break up to 5/10ths cover and we start streaming contrails in the colder air. Then we are out into clear weather. “Break out the cocoa chaps.” There is a slight haze over the North Sea but as we approach the English coast the weather clears again and we can just make out The Wash. Monica warns us of an enemy on our tail but Hermit and Jimbo have both spotted him at 6 high and let rip with everything they have got. The Ju88 C6 is badly damaged but not before he plants a number of shells in our wireless compartment then breaks off trailing smoke in the clear night sky. “Jaybe check on Jack.” I fear the worst as the cockpit is filled with the smell of cordite and blood. Jaybe’s voice sounds very shaky when he reports, “Jack’s bought it skipper. Wireless has been destroyed and I have put out a small fire.” Flt Sgt Dixon’s head has been blown clear off his body and the radio compartment is covered in blood.

We circle the field and line up for a landing. There is none of the usual chatter over the intercom as the tension is relieved at being home. We miss Jack singing and Robbie certainly doesn’t feel like it. We land and for a moment no one stirs as we hear the clicking of the engines as they cool down. As we open the side hatch and we hear the dawn chorus and smell the clear air of an early summer’s morning. The sky is pink with the dawn as we make our way to be debriefed by the Intelligence Officer.