

Steve Dixon's Target For Tonight online campaign
Mission 20 10th/11th September 1944 Area bombing Castrop, Germany

"The Target for tonight, gentlemen, is the synthetic oil production facilities and coal mines at Castrop in the Ruhr valley. Make it a good one." Oh God no— back to the Happy Valley!

With the fall of Brussels and the capture of Ypres by the Polish forces it looked like the Germans were at last being forced back and we should have a less risky run into Germany.

"Dutch coast ahead skipper." "Thanks Ben. Keep your eyes peeled everyone."

With very little moon the next hour drags by uneventfully. Just as I think this is going to be a milk run to the north of Eindhoven a short burst of flak crackles around us.

"Everyone OK? Report in." Apart from the rear gunner everyone reports in OK. "Ronnie – go and check on Tom.

"Skipper the tail turret is is turned into the beam position so I can't get in."

"Use the fire axe – he may be hurt."

As the wireless operator hacks his way in he can see the gunner slumped over the guns and a piece of flak has passed straight through the turret.

"Not good skipper. Looks like he's gone west."

"OK get back to the Astrodome to check for nightfighters. Target will be coming up soon."

No flak or fighters on the run in., that's a blessing.

"Target slightly obscured skipper. Master bomber says to bomb on the green. "

"Bombs gone! Looks good."

Just then we are coned by searchlights and corkscrewing and diving doesn't shake the blighters off. However, the AA fire doesn't come anywhere near us so no harm done. The just like that we are out of it and back into the darkness. I decide to keep down low for the rest of the run home in case I bump into the rest of the bomber stream by climbing.

"Can't see a ruddy thing!" "Just keep blinking until your eyes clear."

Sometime later somewhere between Rotterdam and Amsterdam a voice comes on the intercom, "Are we at the target yet?" Strewth, it's our tail gunner, Tom. "Tom? We thought that you'd copped it." It turns out that a coupling had come loose on his oxygen hose, but he was getting just enough of a trickle to keep him alive. Going below 10,000 feet had revived the luck blighter.

"Hey boys look to port! We've got our own escort." And there was a Mosquito at 9 o'clock high probably returning from a Serrate raid on a nightfighter base.

Photos showed a 40% bombing success.