

Target for Tonight Steve Dixon's online campaign  
18/19 November 1943 target Hagen, Germany  
102 Squadron "Bouncing Betty"

"Break left! Break left! Me110 attacking vertical dive," Bullets were ripping through our fuselage before our MUG Yorkie Hobson has finished speaking. The Stirling shuddered as he opened up with his own guns but the Me was diving so fast none of his bullets found their mark. We had only just crossed the Suffolk coast and hadn't even tested our own guns at this point. A bit of arude awakening for our first mission together.

"He's coming round for another attack and Monica is screeching fit to bust so watch our tail." "He's at 6 o'clock high." This time our MUG and tail gunners got their shots in first but the inexperienced gunners couldn't land a single hit between them. The Jerry poured his fire into the starboard wing, front centre section and the nose before breaking off narrowly missing a collision. "Report in any damage." "Bomb aimer – looks like the auto pilot and bomb release both copped a packet, skipper. Can someone bring me a dressing as I have a cut forearm." "Are you OK to press on Chalky?" "Certainly skipper. Just a scratch."

"Enemy coast ahead." Despite the 10/10ths cloud we don't receive a recall."

After that things settled down until we started the approach to the target. "Navigator to Bomb Aimer." Taffy Owen's Welsh lilt came over the intercom. "As you are bombing on manual keep your eyes peeled for a major road with a railway running parallel to it on the right then on the other side is a river with a railway line on its left. These should take you up the valley and just as they turn off to the left you should see 5 church spires immediately before the target." "Thanks Taffy there's quite a bit of ground fog but I can just about make out the river."

It was at that point that a Dornier 217 was spotted trying to get into position to carry out a Shrage Musik attack but the combination of Monica and Doc Watson, our eagle eyed tail gunner, thwarted his attempt. Both sides exchanged fire but without any noticeable effect. Then the heavy flak opened up and we lost the port wing aileron and took a chunk of shrapnel home lodged in the open bomb bay doors.

"Master Bomber. Master Bomber. Bomb on the green. I say again bomb on the green."

"Target slightly obscured. Bombs gone."

Emptied of its load Bouncing Betty lived up to her name and reared up and then settled down again as we turned to port on the homeward leg. However a Wilde Sau Fw190 A 5UZ has other ideas as just as the light flak stopped pounced on us from 6 o'clock high. He must have been a novice as he started shooting far too soon and having given away his position our gunners were able to zone him with their combined fire and we saw his port wing detach and the plane was left spinning out of control.

The journey home was uneventful and as we touched down we could see that there had been a snow shower while we had been away. As the crew stepped down the ladder it seemed that the air had never smelt sweeter than at that moment.