

Target for Tonight Steve Dixon online campaign  
102 Squadron - C Copper  
Mission 1 - 24/25 July 1943  
Target Hamburg

### Operation Gomorra

It is absolutely wizard to reassemble the 'old firm' again for a second tour of duty and we have been given our old bus C Copper albeit fitted with bags of new gizmos including a ground radar jammer and H2S radar all of which has involved training courses for some of the fellows. Tonight, we will be using something called "window" for the first time which we have been reliably informed will totally blind the German's radar. This is going to be an all-out effort with the RAF bombing at night and the USAAF bombing during the day. The hot dry conditions that we have had for the last week should ensure that our incendiaries back up by HE should really do some damage to the U-boat pens, shipyards and heavy industry.

Looks like we are playing "tail end Charlie2 for our first mission so I hope that all these new measures are up to snuff otherwise we are really going to catch a packet from the Hun.

With the sun still streaming in through the canopy it looks to be a glorious summer's evening. There's the green light and C Copper trundles down the runway, slowly at first then with a gentle bump she's airborne and the rose-tinted sunlight is just kissing the tops of the clouds as we set out across the flat East Anglian landscape to the Assembly Point north of Cromer.

"OK test your guns everyone." Blessedly no contrails and no lurking bandits either as we are embraced by the darkness and a sliver of moon shows itself. Below there is a slight haze over the sea and we could be all alone except that we know that all around us are the fellows from our squadron and up ahead the rest of the bomber stream stretching all the way to the black heart of Nazi Germany.

Ever onward and now five tenths cloud as we reach a point due north of Amsterdam and in the colder air we start producing a stream of contrails but no sign of the opposition.

Then tenth tenths cloud but no recall. Then the cloud clears and below we can just make out the coastline of Holland through a light mist. The Window dropped by the chaps up ahead must be working because we haven't seen any evidence of night fighters.

"Time to change course Skipper, come right to one-four-zero otherwise that flak on Heligoland will having a go at us." "Roger."

As we are crossing the enemy coast, we can make out the mouth of the Weser estuary and then the River Elbe. "This H2S is marvellous, Skipper! I can see the shape of the river and everything." "Time to dogleg to bring us onto the target, steer two-one-three." "My God, look at that!" said our Bomb Aimer Flt Sgt Gently. Up ahead there is no mistaking the target which is glowing like a furnace with flames shooting up hundreds of feet as the largely wooden city has been set ablaze by the chaps up ahead. "Standby everyone we are making our run into the target. Pathfinders are reporting exceptionally high winds created by the firestorm so adjust your aim accordingly." "Skipper, there's a ruddy great Ju88 G7 on our tail and I think I can see murder in his eyes. He seems to be covered in that Christmas tinsel that you keep chucking out." Scottie was much given to rolling his "r"s when he was feeling particularly

stressed. Scottie shredded the Ju's starboard wing and as it spiralled down into the inferno below we saw at least one parachute open but caught by the updraught it flew up and over us.

“Out of a fired ship, which by no way  
But drowning could be rescued from the flame,  
Some men leap'd forth, and ever as they came  
Near the foes' ships, did by their shot decay;  
So all were lost, which in the ship were found,  
They in the sea being burnt, they in the burnt ship drown'd.”

This from ‘Shakespeare’ Hathaway who always seems to have an appropriate quotation for any occasion. “Who wrote that? Spencer?” “No, John Donne.”

The flak was totally silent, probably overwhelmed by the destruction of the first, second and third waves. At 0.49hrs our bomb aimer Flt Sgt Gently announces very calmly, “On target now..... bombs gone.” Target completely obscured but on target 50%. The city below was now glowing white hot as the burning buildings, tinder dry from a week of hot weather and no rain were causing such an updraught that they were sucking in the air that fed the flames even more. It seemed even at this altitude we could feel the heat. There was no flak on the run out of the target and Window did its job of keeping the night fighters at bay.

Dodging the flak round Bremen and the coast is only very slightly obscured by ground fog and despite the colder air we are not producing contrails. Then as we head out over the North Sea the cloud really bubbles up and we quickly in ten tenths cumulus. Monica warns us of a night fighter on our tail and Scottie glimpses a Ju88 in between the clouds but he clearly hasn't seen us but then an Me110-G4 appears at 12 high and tracers are zipping towards us – strange how they start off so slowly but as they get nearer, they suddenly seem to speed up. No harm done and now it's our turn. In reply, Jimbo in the MUG and “Shakespeare” Hathaway our wireless gunner let fly and splash hits all over the nose of the Jerry aircraft but no fatal damage. However, it is enough to deter him from attacking again and he dives away into the clouds.

Pressing on the clouds start to break up and we have five tenths cover. Our Flight Engineer Flying Officer Hastings comes on the intercom, “Skipper Gee is on the blink and seems to have gone West I'm afraid.” “Robbie, can you get an astral fix?” “Aye, of course I can, man. It's all canny. We are on course.” “OK break out the cocoa and sandwiches.”

Leaving the Dutch coast behind and the clouds thicken up again to ten tenths. The cold at this altitude has jammed the tail guns. Scottie is not best pleased “If we are attacked no all I can do is chuck snowballs at them.” “OK Scottie, move into the rear section and man the Ventral gun. We are nearly home.”

Approaching the East coast there is finally a let up in the cloud and the sea has a light covering of mist. Our contrails catch the rose pink of the rising sun while the sea below is still a milky dark purple colour. The weather over base was pretty poor but we made a textbook landing. “Piece of cake, old man.” We went off to debriefing happy in the knowledge that our first mission together after such a long time had gone well but the sight of Hamburg burning will haunt my dreams for a very long time to come. Perhaps I will write to Agatha before turning in, I certainly don't feel like sleeping at the moment.