

## Target for Tonight – Steve Dixon’s online campaign

102 Squadron  
Mission 3 Hamburg

“Gentlemen I give you today’s fox.” So saying I took a quick swig from my silver hip flask and passed it to my Flight Engineer, FO Christopher Buddle. Chris had like most of the crew had already survived one tour of duty. He was unfortunate enough to have served with 207 Squadron who were equipped with the notoriously unreliable Avro Manchesters. Because they spent so much time grounded with mechanical faults 207 Squadron was known throughout the service as “The 207<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot”. My new crew were a great bunch of fellows I already knew PO Clive Taylor, our Bomb Aimer as he had served with 102 Squadron before. He had the misfortune to be in the Cafe Royal celebrating the end of his first tour of duty when it was bombed and not sports a very sporty limp. His father flew with the RNAS (“Rather Naughty After Sunset” as the Royal Naval Air Service was known by RFC types) in the Great War so flying was in his blood. Our Wireless/Gunner Flt Sgt Peter Tullo was a bit of a rum sort, having been picked up by the local constabulary for suspected Black Market activities and was the only member of the crew who was starting their first tour of duty, Our Navigator, WO Philip (Pip) Royall washed out of pilot training in Canada but proved to be first rate at Navigation. His precision fix saved his previous crew when they were forced to ditch in the North Sea and Coastal Command were able to pick them up in no time. Our MUG is FltSgt Fraser Wilson and heady mix of a Scottish father and a mother from Yorkshire who enjoys playing practical jokes on other members of the squadron but I have told him that the crew of Phoenix is definitely off limits! Finally our Tail Gunner is WO Peter Walmsley who completed his first tour on Hampdens and Beauforts. A bit of a worrier and an inveterate chain smoker on the ground.

We are off to Hamburg tonight as the next phase of Operation Gomorrah. The crews who had already been there wondered if there would be anything left to bomb as when they saw it last it was glowing white hot like the inside of a blast furnace.

Our take off in the first third of the bomber stream went smoothly enough and Phoenix seems to be a good crate. We have just left the assembly point and made altitude when Monica warns us that we have company and Fraser spots a JU88C6 trying to jump on to our tail out of the cloud cover then Phoenix starts to rattle and shake as he and Peter let fly and the fuselage splits open and cockpit is smashed to pieces before the port wing tears off and what’s left of the Jerry spins out of control. “Silly beggar should have stayed at home,” says Fraser.

As the cloud cover breaks up a bit to five tenths over the North Sea we start to stream contrails and it isn’t long before a Do217J1 gets a fix on us and using his expertise to try an attack from 3 high but Fraser has obviously been eating plenty of carrots as he gets in a burst which rips off the port wing and a black parachute is soon seen to bloom and that’s another Jerry getting an early bath. “Jolly well done done Fraser!”

The Texel Islands can just be seen to the South and we are still producing contrails. We catch occasional glimpses of darker shapes of various nightfighters but they clearly don’t see us. “Peter, go back and man the Ventral Gun just in case any of those blighters try to sneak up on us from below.”

Just as make our turn to Starboard to avoid Heligoland an Me110G4 tries an attack from head on but he is obviously a rookie as he fires too soon and if he scored any hits then his missed anything vital. He disappears off into the night before we can respond.

“OK chaps I think it’s time to give this Window stuff a go.” Ten minutes later a Ju88C6 bounces us from 9 High and he manages to damage both the Ammo Feed tracks to the Tail Turret and then a stray shell bounced off the H2S housing but didn’t cause any actual damage. Jerry must have been out of ammo as he didn’t make a second attack. “OK Pete W. leave the tail guns and take over the ventral gun from Peter T. Peter T you chuck the Window out of the tube.

Approaching the target area we could see the glow from the fires still burning from the previous raids and there was smoke columns up to miles high. “OK chaps ignore the dummy yellow route markers and follow the reds.” The searchlights were just standing up straight without moving and the flak was completely random like a widespread barrage. We are very fortunate as despite the flak being concentrated at our height to leave the Wild Boar nightfighters to make their attacks on the higher flying Lancs and Halifaxes we weren’t shot up at all. Marvellous stuff this Window! The whole town seems like a mass of flames with frequent flashes as a cookie is dropped. “Master Bomber, Master Bomber to first wave bomb on the green, bomb on the green.” Although the target was slightly obscured we manage to achieve 60% accuracy with a good steady bomb run. On the run out from the target the flak was equally ineffective and although a Do217J1 tried to intercept us we were able to shake him off and the trip home was uneventful.

Touching down at base we have survived our first mission together with nothing worse than damaged ammo feeds. We have been credited with our two kills a JU88C6 and a Do217N2 so all in all not a bad night’s work.