

Target for Tonight Steve Dixon's online campaign  
H Hotspur 102 Squadron  
Mission 1 – Area: Ludwigshafen, Germany 20/21 September 1944

This is the worst time, getting kitted up in the crew room when you have all your cold weather clothing on and we are waiting for the lorry to take us out to the aircraft. I look around and I wonder who won't be coming back? It can happen to you on your first trip or the last trip of the tour. As I look around at everyone the lorries arrive and they are calling out our names so out we go. It gets better than as you have a job to do and routine takes over.

It is odd as I can just make out the lights of the nearby town as we no longer have the blackout but since the 17<sup>th</sup> of September we now have "dim out" and blackouts are only needed if we have a warning of a raid. Everyone is talking about the Battle of Arnhem and how the war might be over by Christmas. Could it really be true?

The lorry stops and looking up at H Hotspur she looks as if she too has had just about enough. There are patches covering battle damage on just about every surface. The familiar smells of dust, aviation fuel and fabric dope are comforting as we all settle into our allotted positions.

"Number three engine is running really rough Skipper." That was my Flight Engineer Chris Tulley. "OK lads lets sprint across dispersal to the spare bus."  
We arrived out of breath only to see her trundling out onto the runway as she had been nabbed by another crew. Nothing for it we would have to take H Hotspur.

We tried the engines again and manage to coax number three engine back to life. We line up on the runway and get the signal to go. As we roar down the runway but before we could reach flying speed number three packed in altogether so before we run out of runway I raised the undercarriage to bring her to a halt shouting over the intercom to get out as soon as we come to a stop. Once the god awful sound of screeching metal stops I exit the now burning aircraft and then check that everyone else is safe. But Tom our rear gunner is not there. Rushing round to the rear turret I can see that he is stuck so there is nothing for it but to go back into the aircraft to see if I can free him, but I can see that is a no go and my Irving jacket is starting to burn so I grab a fire axe and get back out and smash and hack my way into the rear turret and at last Tom is able to jump down. We run like hell to join the others at a safe distance away from H Hotspur just as her bomb load goes up.