

Mission 17  
102 Squadron  
B for Bobby  
Target: Wilhelmshaven

Just heard that the House of Commons held a vote of censure against Churchill's handling of the war with specific reference to the poor show in North Africa. Perhaps some of those johnnies in Westminster would like to come along with us tonight to bomb the U boat shipyards and get a taste of what war is really like. The war in Russia is going just as badly with Sevastopol taken by the Jerries. I doubt that anyone in the Soviet Union is calling for a vote against Stalin. Surely things have got to improve soon.

Another mission against a coastal target. At least the targets are that much easier to find and being mostly over water there is less flak to contend with. Poor old "Hermit" Crabbe, our tail gunner, has taken to flying with an axe stuffed down the leg of his right boot. Being trapped like that has really given him the heebie geebies. What is everyone else doing on this fine Saturday summer's evening I wonder? I haven't heard from Agatha for a bit. I do hope that nothing has happened to her. I hear that the first of the Yank Flying Fortresses has arrived in jolly old Blighty. It will be a tonic if we can hit the Huns day and night.

All checks complete and everything is on the top line. We are in the front of the bomber stream tonight. Green light and we slowly trundle off down the flight path gathering speed like some huge beast about to charge. The faint cornflower blue of a summer's evening changes to indigo as we head out over the Wash to the assembly point and then we are swallowed up by the inky darkness while below the sea is shrouded in fog. No contrails and a crescent moon so hopefully this is going to be another milk run. Monica starts shrilling and we are all on the alert. Damn, and we haven't even tested the guns yet! "It's alright it's just a Stirling that got too close," says Jimbo Japp our MUG in his lugubrious tone. "OK - well test your guns anyway - but Hermit, please make sure you don't shoot down our friend. I would hate to have to dock the price of a replacement bus out of your pocket money."

Out over the Dogger Ban and the sea mist clears and we have five tenths cloud cover. But Jerry must have taken the night off as we don't see any nightfighter activity and Monica is quiet. 30 minutes later and we start to produce contrails as the air is getting colder. Monica is shrilling again and both Hermit and Jimbo let rip on a Me110 F4 coming in at 6 high. Their combined efforts have little effect but they have both found the range and his starboard wing sheds some of its covering. Undeterred he returns fire and smashes up the instrument panel taking out our intercom. Damn it! Not sure where the rest of his shells hit but there doesn't feel like too much damage. "JB take a look around and check for damage - see if anyone is hurt if not I am pressing on." I shouted to our Flight Engineer. The Me110 doesn't come back - possibly making his way back along the rest of the bomber stream.

What seems like an age later JB returns and shouting in my ear tells me that no one is hurt and that apart from some new ventilation holes nothing apart from the intercom has been damaged.

As we arrive to a point due North of the Texel Islands off the Dutch coast the cloud really begins to build up and we soon have ten tenths cloud cover. There is no recall signal so hopefully the weather over the target area is better.

Some time later Robbie our navigator pops up with a scrap of paper with our new course 109 magnetic and a warning not to drift too far to port or we will be within range of the flak on Heligoland. I gave him a thumbs up in reply. The cloud is breaking up and then without warning – (damn that intercom) shells start exploding from the nose to the tail as a ruddy great Ju88 C6 carries out a vertical dive attack narrowly avoiding a collision.

The auto pilot is totally smashed, worse still our W/T is totally destroyed, the auto bomb release mechanism is inoperable and the hydraulic hand pumps for flaps are damaged finally the rudder isn't responding. Good old Jimbo has kept his head and has made the Jerry pay for all that damage he has inflicted on us by brewing up his fuel tank and as the Ju88 dives away below us we see the sky turn bright yellow -- he explodes. "Everyone alright?" I ask before remembering that the intercom is out. Damn it!

We limp along and as we cross the coast the cloud really builds up to ten tenths cloud cover. Robbie pops us again with another note giving the course for the run in on the target. I shouted over to Robbie "Go and warn Gee Gee that it is all down to him. Everything will be on manual." We don't see any nightfighters on the run into target and the flak is very light we even manage to avoid the searchlights. So now it is all up to Sgt Gently. The bomb bay doors are open, and the drag effect is difficult to correct with the rudder out of commission.

Target is completely obscured so we will have to bomb by Dead reckoning, 5% accuracy. With the bombs gone the old bus leaps up like a startled rabbit and we turn for home. On the run out the searchlights find us and the medium flak starts bursting all around us except for one shell which rips into the Electrical Junction Box No1 good thing the bombs have gone but landing this crate is going to be just a bit dicky. Monica is shrilling her warning but still dazzled by the searchlights we can't see where the Jerry is. Turns out to be a Do217J1 attaching from 9 level but his aim is off and he fails to land any hits Jimbo returns fire but with equal lack of success. Jerry disappears off into the night.

Back out over the sea we leave the cloud behind but there is buckets of fog over the sea. Robby gives two course corrections. To get us back on track for the homeward leg.

Midway home and with ten tenths cloud cover and without warning we are attacked by an Me110 G4 from 1.30 level smashing the windscreen, hitting our Flight Engineer, taking out the heating to the nose compartment and I felt a bang to my head and felt very hot and faint but with the cold air buffeting my face from the broken windscreen managed to stay conscious. This was a very skilled adversary (Hpt. Manfred Meurer) as he climbed like a lift did a half roll and came screaming back down in a vertical dive. Jimbo decided to give him an extended burst of spray fire and this had the desired effect of making him break off his attack. Struggling to clear my head I tried to wipe the blood off from my goggles but it had already frozen. I was going to have to lose height or we were all going to freeze to death. Pulling up my goggles so that I could see the altimeter I started to lose height. The dizziness was so bad now and I slipped off my oxygen mask to gulp down the cold air. Perhaps we should take out the windscreen on every flight as it gets rid of that awful smell of cordite, aviation fuel and ....

someone was shaking me. I must have drifted off for a second. It's Robbie he's trying to tell me something. If only I could focus.... JB is in a bad way, abdomen wound. Am I OK? Yes, yes I think so. That fog looks damn close ... pull her up a bit. Yes now what? Robbie shaking me again – course change . We are over land. Norfolk. Right, take stock - rudder out, flaps out, landing gear out. “Robbie tell the chaps to sit with their backs to the main spar, if you can't move JB then wedge him in somehow and then knock out all the emergency escape hatches. I am going to have to belly land the bus and then everyone needs to get out as quickly as they can. Oh and fire off a red flare on the approach to let the ground staff know what we are doing.”

Deep breaths. Slowly ease her down, easy, easy. A tremendous screeching as the underside of the aircraft makes contact with the runway before slewing left and clumps of grass come hurtling through the broken windscreen. Can't see a thing but it doesn't really matter as there isn't really anything that I can do now. It seems like the bus will never stop. I must tell Agatha about ..... Darkness.

Woke up to the smell of disinfectant and carbolic soap. Stewth my head hurts. JB didn't make it Doc says that he was goner long before the crash. The others all made it out OK. Need to sleep now.