

THE REAR GUNNER

SCENE: AN AVRO LANCASTER BOMBER DURING A RAID ON THE RUHR VALLEY, 1943.

NAVIGATOR: Just crossing the Dutch coast now, Skip. 35 minutes to TA.

PILOT: Thanks, Charlie. Better start dropping window.

NAVIGATOR: Roger, Skip. Window dropped.

PILOT: It's Happy Valley tonight, lads, and it's usually quite a party. Rear and mid gunners—keep your eyes peeled for fighters. They won't be far away.

REAR- GUNNER: Roger, Skip.

MID-GUNNER: Roger, Skip.

BOMB-AIMER: Heavy flak ahead, Skip. Looks pretty hairy.

PILOT: Thanks, Jock, I see it. You just concentrate on getting those cookies on target and let me fly this bus.

BOMB-AIMER: Roger, Skip...

SUDDENLY SEVERAL LOUD BANGS SHAKE THE AIRCRAFT.

NAVIGATOR: What the hell was that?

BOMB-AIMER: Can't be flak, we're nowhere near it yet.

PILOT: Mid-gunner—can you see anything?

MID-GUNNER: Nothing above us, Skip.

PILOT: Rear gunner? Anything your end?

SILENCE.

PILOT: Rear gunner?

REAR-GUNNER: Bandits, Skip! Bandits! Three of them at least! At 11 o'clock! Coming up fast!

PILOT: Then shoot at them, lad! Fire your weapon!

ANOTHER SERIES OF LOUD BANGS SHAKES THE PLANE.

PILOT: Rear gunner? Rear gunner—are you there? Come in? Does anyone know his ruddy name?

ALL THE OTHERS MUTTER, “NO”

PILOT: Christ—trust us to get a new arse end Charlie on a sortie like this. Rear gunner? Rear gunner....?!

NOTES.

Continue the scene so that we find out what happens to the crew and their aircraft. Try to extend the scene by at least another 2 pages.

The scene could be played like a radio play, where we only hear the voices of the crew. However, with the imaginative use of every-day items like chairs etc, you could also show the action as it takes place. Can you create the aircraft interior from objects/furniture that you find around you?

There is quite a lot of RAF jargon in this excerpt—window, Happy Valley, bus, cookies etc. A trained bomber crew would clearly know what these expressions mean and wouldn't have to explain them to each other. Can you find out what these expressions mean and devise some way to demonstrate to the audience their meaning? Eg- when the pilot talks about the 'bus' he could tap his hand on the interior of the plane.

How do you think sound might play a part in enhancing the drama of the scene? Clearly there would be lots of noise on the bomber- the roar of the engines, the crackle of voices on the radio, the sound of the bullets hitting the fuselage etc. How could you recreate these sounds and incorporate them into the play?

What has happened to the rear-gunner? Has he been hit by gunfire from the enemy fighters? Or perhaps there is another reason for his radio silence? Something unexpected or unusual? Does a member of the crew go to the back of the plane to find out? Do the crew care very much about the rear gunner, since he is new aboard the plane and no-one has got to know him yet?

Try to create a definite, dramatic ending to the play. Do the crew complete their mission or are they shot down? Do they bail out? Are they taken prisoner? The audience will want to know what happens to them.