

Target For Tonight online campaign. Mission 12 Osnabruck, Germany 1st / 2nd February 1945
102 Squadron C Cobblers

The cockpit is full of smoke and the aircraft is rocked by another hit from heavy flak. The bright white light of the searchlights coning us make the smoke an impenetrable mass making it almost impossible to see the instruments. Brett is yelling in my ear that number three engine is on fire.

“Pilot to all crew. Brace yourself I am going into a steep dive so hold on tight!”

I am hoping that the dive will solve all of our current problems and help us to evade the flak and searchlights, put out the engine fire and get us below 10,000 feet before the oxygen runs out.

We are hit again, and again. The acrid smell of cordite fills the aircraft.

“Paul get rid of the bombs now!”

As he does so we are hit again but this time I see tracer coming from behind me and smashing the cockpit windscreen.

“Break left, BREAK LEFT! Nightfighter almost in the turret with me.” The urgency in our tail gunner’s voice leaves us in no doubt that he means it.

The smoke is cleared by the shattered windscreen as a black shadow passes overhead and narrowly misses our nose. It too has an engine on fire and oil is splattered on the remnants of the windscreen.

“Brett check the damage.”

“Will do skipper just as soon as I put this fire out.”

The controls are feeling sloppy and the aircraft keeps pulling to port even with full rudder to counteract it. I am having to fight just to keep the nose up.

After 5 minutes Brett is back and he has to shout in my ear as the wind screaming through the broken windscreen makes it almost impossible to hear.

“We are losing a lot of fuel and there’s no way we will make it back over the sea. I reckon we have only got 30 minutes of juice left, if that. The good news is no one is hurt but Ian is stuck in the tail turret as the Dead Man’s Handle is shot to blazes. The DR Compass is shot away. Number 1 engine is running hot. We have a rudder shot away and control cables severed.”

“Nigel give me a course to take us south into Belgium. Dave get on the W/T to call up any friendly bases in the area.”

I can feel my face beginning to get frost bite between my goggles and mask.

Once Nigel gave me the course to steer everything settled down. We drank the cocoa to keep warm and got ready for a crash landing if it was needed.

In the event we put down at a friendly base just to the north of Oudsbergen and while not my finest landing at least the undercart didn’t collapse. Piece of cake.