

Target for Tonight Steve Dixon's online campaign mission 14
Rail Yards Courtrai 5/6th December 1943
102 Squadron Bouncing Betty

Having completed our conversion to Lancasters in record time we are flying our first active mission tonight. The boys unanimously decided to keep the name of our old Stirling for the new kite as it was thought to be unlucky to change names. The Lancaster is an excellent crate but like all aircraft it has a couple of problems. The first is that you have watch yourself while taxiing and during takeoff as with the torque from the engines it has a nasty habit of pulling to the left. The other thing that struck us is how cramped it is after the Stirling in the event of having to bail out. The Wireless operator will have to clamber over the main spar to reach the hatch to get out. I hope that we don't have to put that to the test.

Tonight we are taking a USAAF chappie along as a spare bod. Seems they want to find out more about night flying. Nice chap by the name of Vince Rizzoli.

Clean take off we are just clearing the coast around Walton on the Naze when we a ruddy great shadow passes over the cockpit. "What the hell was that?" "Looks like an Me110 skipper, like." But either he didn't see us or he had other fish to fry I don't know. A lot of chatter amongst the crew after that until I told them to pipe down and get on with their job.

"Enemy coast ahead." The words are barely out of my mouth when shells start thumping into every part of Betty. Walking hits! "Oxygen out up in the forward compartment. Otherwise nothing important damaged skipper." "It's an Me110 G4 coming round again 10.30 high." Tracer flying in both directions but no hits on either side. "Where is he? Anyone see him?" "No. No sign." "Losing height now. Keep your eyes skinned chaps."

Approaching the target area with half a minute to go, fighter flares raining down and just opening the bomb doors when our MUG opens up on a Wild Sau. Turns out to be an Fw190 A5 UZ according to Vince who is watching via the Astro dome. Lots of shouting but we got him. Bags of flak. Target slightly obscured but well marked. 60% on target. More flak. Bright explosion – bomber or night fighter – can't tell. Time to turn for home.

Return trip goes without incident.

Crossing the coast over Lowestoft the Suffolk countryside is gleaming white covered in snow or frost. You wouldn't know that there was a war on.

Bit of a dicey moment as we are coming into land as one of the tyres gives out but I just about manage to keep her off the grass. Piece of cake old boy, piece of cake.

Recording of attack <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R5NI-IrUU0&t=68s>

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