

Target for Tonight
“The 'ell Cat” - Lancaster Mk 1

Multiplayer Campaign Mission 40 1944 Mission 20
(The 'ell Cat's 3rd combat mission),
Area Bombing – Berlin, Germany - night of March 2nd and morning of March 3rd, 1944
Crescent Moon

The crews sat in the briefing room at Norwich as the curtain was pulled back on the route for tonight's bomb run. Cheers almost shook the room as Berlin was revealed to be the target. It had been slightly over a month and bad weather has kept the bombers grounded but as the snow and ice storms began to clear, Bomber Command had been busy assigning missions. For the crew of The 'Ell Cat, this would be the longest mission they had ever flown – 7 hour round trip including forming up maneuvers. But we were hitting the Nazis hard tonight and that's what matters.

The 'Ell Cat is honored to be given the lead position in the bomber stream. The night was cold and snow covered the ground but the sky was clear under a crescent moon. 'Ell Cat's 4 Merlin engines roared as she took to the crisp night sky. Within 45 minutes, over 30 Lancasters were heading towards the Sea followed by Halifaxes. The bombers traveled through the night at 21,000 feet without leaving contrails. Over the Sea, PO Dixon gave the order to test the machine guns and eight .303 machine guns roared into the night. Sgt. Evens, the bomb aimer, took up his secondary position in the hull and began dropping Window from the chute to help confuse the German long range radar systems.

Soon we approach the Hague in the Netherlands. In the distance are searchlights, flak and fires. But now the bombers are leaving contrails in the frigid air. Cpl. Naylor, The 'Ell Cat's tail gunner, reports flak bursts and searchlights locking onto bombers behind us.

The bomber stream turns slightly north and flies just north of the Dortmund flak zones. The contrails have faded allowing us some small comfort that our Lancs were a little more difficult to spot.

Soon its 10/10 cloud cover below us as far as the eyes can see. Our wireless operator, Sgt. Moss, keeps at attention expected a recall notice due to weather to come in at any time but the message doesn't come.

As we pass south of Hanover, we see searchlights in the distance. Are we hitting that city tonight as well?

As we approach Berlin, the clouds begin to break from 10/10 to 5/5 cloud cover. That will help us spot the target zone and the yellow and green parachute flares dropped by the pathfinders. German home defense personnel have now begun setting flares themselves to prompt our bombers to drop bombs far afield of the target zone. We must be cautious. Evans leaves the Window position and returns to his bomb aimer position in the nose of the Halifax.

“Pathfinder flares spotted,” reports Evans. “Bomb doors open.” Flak bursts everywhere as searchlights slash across the sky. Above us, clusters of white flares float down on parachutes. This is a new tactic used by the Germans as high flying aircraft illuminate the bomber stream from above. Suddenly every flak gun in our cell falls silent. Dixon immediately executes a violent evasive maneuver. While at nearly the same time, The 'Ell Cat is shaken by cannon shells hitting her from below as a Shrage Musik equipped Me110 G-4 which is also equipped with Lichtenstein radar and

Flensburg electronic warfare modules shoots directly in The 'Ell Cat. The bomb release system is knocked out; tail turret's dead man switch is damaged now the tail gunner can't fire his guns or bail out; the H2S radar is out; superficial damage to the nose position; #1 engine loses power; left rudder takes 1 hit; port wing takes superficial damage; and the rear hull takes superficial damage.

In the distance, we see an aircraft explode. Was it one of ours or one of theirs? Dixon stabilizes the plane and asks everyone to check in. The bomb aimer then gives the coordinates to hit the target as the plane flies over it Evans reports a red light on the automatic bomb drop system. Sgt Moss heads from his wireless position to the bomb bay to initiate a manual dropping of the bombs. This takes several precious minutes and only 20% of the bombs are on target.

The bomb doors close and engine #1 is feathered as The 'Ell Cat turns to a return course. Below her, fires burn fiercely in Berlin. Dixon keeps The 'Ell Cat in slight evasive maneuvers which is made somewhat more difficult by the feathered # 1 engine. In the distance, another aircraft explodes and then the flak starts up again.

Now over the Sea, The 'Ell Cat shudders as her tail section is hit by cannon fire from a He-219 "Owl". The expert Luftwaffe pilot attacked from 3 o'clock low. Dixon takes evasive action and comes around again. Tail gunner Naylor turret and guns are frozen but he immediately reports that the high tech night fighter is coming around from 6 o'clock low. Flight Engineer Collier reports visual confirmation on the Monica CRT screen and Monica begins chirping over the comms. Dixon noses up and slightly to port to give Mid Upper Gunner Powell a clear shot. His 4 .303s rattle to life and the bullets tear into the left wing of the "Owl". The Owl's expert pilot performs a wingover and the radar equipped night fighter disappears into the night.

"Good shooting Powell!" compliments Dixon.

The 'Ell Cat limps back to Norwich and as she makes her landing approach a red lights indicates that the landing gear will not drop. Evans and Moss hurry to the manual drop handles and begin frantically turning them as Dixon fires off a flare and takes the Cat up and back around the airfield. Unfortunately, the landing gear are frozen in to the up position.

"Everyone take your stations and strap in. We'll have to belly land her." commands Dixon.

As fire trucks and rescue vehicles move on to the field, The 'Ell Cat comes down hard on her belly. Thankfully no one is hurt and The 'Ell Cat is expected to be in top shape after 1 to 2 weeks in the repair shop. The crew debriefs and settles in for breakfast after Naylor is cut out of the tail turret.

