

Multiplayer Campaign Mission 38 1944 Mission 18 (The 'ell Cat's 1st combat mission),
Area Bombing – Ossun, France - night of January 18th and morning of January 19th, 1944
Half Moon

We were warmly greeted by the other air crew as Pilot Officer Will Dixon (Pilot), Warrant Officer Nick Collier (Flight Engineer) and Sgts. Bishop (Navigator), Evans (Bomb Aimee), Moss (Wireless Operator and Gunner), Powell (Mid-Upper Gunner) and Corporal Naylor (Tail Gunner) took part in their first briefing. We had just become an operational bomber crew serving aboard the fresh from the factory Lancaster Mark I “The 'ell Cat” in the 104th. The briefing showed that our target for tonight are the rail yards, marshaling yards and surrounding blocks of warehouses of Ossun, France. This was going to be an extremely long mission taking our bombers almost to Spain. Cruising altitude was going to be 20,000 feet – expected mission duration was almost 8 hours. We'd be on running on fumes when we returned to England.

After performing the tail wheel ritual we loaded up into our position on The 'ell Cat and ran up her Merlin XX engines feeling the full effect of each 1400 horse power engines upon take off. The half moon reflects off of the snow covered ground as the bombers form up into their bomber streams.

As we leave Merry Ol' England behind we head over the Channel towards Normandy. The 'ell Cat is tail end charlie for the bomber stream. Sgt. Evans leaves his position in the nose of the bomber to his secondary station near the mid-upper gun turret and begins to dumb Window from the chaff tube. The gunners test their .303 machine guns.

Over Normandy its 10/10 cloud cover for as far as the eyes can see. Luckily we have our H25 ground scanning radar although some folks have decried removing the ventral gun turret for the radar pod, it definitely helps us see the features on the ground even through clouds.

As we leave the Normandy area, we seem to be leaving contrails. Great! That will help everyone locate us in the dark.

Soon the cloud layers break and at worst we have 5/10 cloud cover. Near Paris we see searchlights and the burst of flak but they are off in the distance as our route was picked to avoid the heavy flak zones around the metropolis.

So as we leave the Paris region so do our contrails take leave from us and we are back to hopefully travel through the night invisibly to night-fighters.

Around 20 minutes later, searchlights hit our bomber stream and light up the tail end aircraft's including The 'ell Cat! Captain Dixon tries to evade but flak bursts all around us and more searchlights home in on our aircraft!

More flak bursts around us and we can hear shrapnel hitting the bomber's hull. Then the searchlights go off and all is eerily quiet.

“Keep your eyes peeled,” orders Dixon. “Evans lay off the Windows immediately.”

We fly in the quiet night for what seems like an eternity. Sgt. Powell in the mid-upper gun turret reports "I just saw a night fighter but it passed us by. It didn't spot us. Looked like a 110." We are on full alert. 30 minutes go by and no sign of any other night-fighters. "Evans start dumping Windows again." orders Dixon.

Near Toulouse the night is again split by shafts of searchlights. One turns our cockpit blazing blue-white as it nearly blinds everyone. The flak starts again as Dixon takes evasive action. Dixon dodges and weaves and soon we are back in the dark.

"Evans to bomb aimer position please." says Dixon. Ahead we see the fires burning in Ossun from the bombers that have already let loose their terrible gifts of destruction. We also see flares from the pathfinders. Searchlights and flak bursts everywhere.

"On target," reports Evans as he gives the pilot some minor direction changes. "Bomb doors open. Bombs dropped. Bomb doors closed." reports Evans in monotone just as he was in training runs. "40% on target" he reports. There was only minor thermal turbulence.

Dixon takes the bomber in to a steep turn as he adjusts for our return course. Only 4 more hours to go then we'd be back home for debriefing and breakfast.

"Leaving contrails" reports Naylor from his tail gun position. Evans heads back to the Window position.

More searchlights illuminate our bomber stream and then starts the flak. None hits.

As we approach Rouen, our bomber suddenly turns to starboard before Dixon puts us back on course. "We have an autopilot failure," reports Collier. "Looks like we have a hydraulic failure in the autopilot system. Disengage it please Captain." "Roger that" replies Dixon.

Now we are over the Channel. The Monica Tail Warning Radar begins chirping and Collier reports "I have a target approaching from 6 o'clock high." Collier was using the newly added Monica radar screen which shows a green glowing image of anything coming in from behind us. It worked in conjunction with the audio warning which Monica gives us through our intercoms. This is it – our first real combat with a German night-fighter! Both the tail guns and mid-upper guns open up on the incoming Ju88 C-6. We didn't realize it but the Ju88 C-6 was crewed by a veteran 3 man crew and had Lichtenstein radar mounted on its nose section. Eight .303 machine guns damage the Ju88's left wing and his aileron is inoperable on that wing. None-the-less, the veteran crew keeps their nerve and fires at our Lanc. The Ju88's cannon shells tear into the rear center section of the aircraft and the tail turret loses all power. It's out of commission and Naylor is trapped in the turret; the starboard wing suffers superficial damage; a shell damages the bomb site in the nose of the plane; shells tear through the empty bomb bay; superficial damage to the rear center section of the fuselage. Wind rushes through the holes blown in the plane's outer fuselage.

The Ju88 then dives into the night. Luckily it doesn't return.

Just as dawn begins to break, The 'ell Cat lands back at her base.

She has completed her first mission. The ground crew cuts Naylor out of the rear turret. Time for debriefing and breakfast. Then blissful sleep.