

Steve Dixon's Target for Tonight online campaign  
C – Cobblers 102 Squadron  
3/4th April 1945  
Full Moon  
Target Potsdam  
Position Middle

Pilot Officer Dodds' lighter flared in the gloom of the canvas covered lorry that is taking them out to their waiting Lancaster. The purple and white stripes of his brand new DFC ribbon briefly visible as he lit his cigarette. The boys were subdued, their target Potsdam was a hell of a long way to go and too close for comfort to the heavy defences surrounding Berlin. Over half of the trip was over water so less chance of any flak and they had been promised a diversionary raid to attract the thinly spread Luftwaffe defences. But it was still going to a long night.

Flight Lt "Digger" Grimmond ran a systems check just to make sure everything was on the top line. He had already run two checks that afternoon but he was thorough and wanted to be confident that the old bus would behave herself tonight.

The rest of the crew settled into their familiar positions and went through their pre flight rituals. The smell of high octane aviation fuel and doped patches on the previous flak damage filled the fuselage.

Outside the low cloud blocked out the light of the full moon as another light shower pattered on the plexiglass nose as the bomb aimer, Flight Lt Chard, checked the target marker colours agreed for that mission – red over green.

At last the signal was given for them to take off and C Cobblers trundled down the runway with her heavy bomb load and her fuel tanks filled to capacity she seemed reluctant to leave but eventually inched her way into the sky through the rain squalls and haze.

As they flew out over the North sea the solid cloud was awash with the light of a full moon but as they flew to the north of the Dutch coast the cloud broke up and was replaced by ground fog all the way to Germany.

Crossing the coast to the north of Hamburg to avoid the flak batteries defending the port the 10/10ths cloud cover returned.

Somewhere over Wittenberg the cloud broke up slightly and a Ju88G7 flew across their nose in a climbing turn to make his attack from 9 o'clock high. Flight Sgt Grantham in the MUG decided to get his retaliation in first and let fly with an area spray. This proved too much for the inexperienced Luftwaffe pilot who broke off his attack and dived away below the cloud. "Good show George!"

10 minutes out from the target and the broken cloud was making it difficult to spot the target but a red glow showed that the target was well alight. The beams of searchlights cut through the gaps and flak was peppering the sky bouncing the crate around as Flt Lt Paul Chard took control and sought out any recognisable landmarks for his target. There, there was the curve of the Templiner See and there were the Target Indicators Red over green.

"Bombs gone." Paul had a good feeling about this one and later photographic evidence showed 60% on target.

On the homeward run they skirt south of Hamburg but are lit up by a blue master searchlight and coned by 4 others. Heavy flak bursts all around them. Most are misses or superficial but a red hot piece of shrapnel buries itself in the radio and despite Flt Sgt Humphreys best efforts they are unable to transmit.

After a bitterly cold but happily uneventful flight over the North Sea they touch down at base just as the first light of dawn touches the runway.