

The following diary was transcribed from the original handwritten WWII Mission Diary of 1st Lieutenant Leonard A. Kuther, Bombardier, Crew 43, 62nd Bomb Squadron, 39th Bomb Group, 314th Bomb Wing, XXIst Bomber Command, 20th Air Force. No spelling or grammatical changes have been made.

Crew 43

|        |                         |                    |
|--------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1st Lt | Edmond T. Arvin, Jr.    | Airplane Commander |
| 1st Lt | Robert B. Johnson       | Pilot              |
| 1st Lt | Leonard A. Kuther       | Bombardier         |
| 2nd Lt | Glen Durkin             | Navigator          |
| 1st Lt | Stanley Lapinski        | Radar              |
| M/Sgt  | Charles Hardin          | Flight Engineer    |
| S/Sgt  | James C. Wilkes         | Radio Operator     |
| T/Sgt  | William P. Yarns, Jr.   | CFC Gunner         |
| T/Sgt  | Paul Kashmarchik        | Right Gunner       |
| S/Sgt  | Martin T. Mc Donough    | Left Gunner        |
| Sgt    | Thomas M. Mayfield, Jr. | Tail Gunner        |

Thanks to Denise Uhlenkott, daughter of Leonard Kuther for providing a copy of her father's WWII Diary.

Transcription by: Peter Weiler, 39th Bomb Group Web Site Coordinator (Oct 2003)

## WWII Diary of 1st Lt Leonard A. Kuther, Bombardier, P-43

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4 April '45

Departed Mather Field Cal. 0300 – 4 April '45 – Opened sealed orders on route to Honolulu as to our destination. As was sort of expected by our crew we were headed for North Field in Guam. We arrived at John Rogers Fld Honolulu at approximately 1600 some date Flying time 11 hrs 50 min.

While our B-29 was being checked by ground crews there we looked around Waikiki Beach, The Naval Station & Hickham Fld on 5 April '45.

6 April '45

Departed Honolulu 0730 for Kawjalien (sic) Island. After 13 hrs 19 minutes we arrived on the tiny island, after crossing the International Date Line. Facilities were very poor on Kawjalien (sic) it was running when we arrived and continued intermittently until we departed.

9 April '45

Departed Kawjalien (sic) for Guam 0900. After hitting a lot of bad weather we arrived on Guam at 1530. Flying time was 7 hrs 11 minutes.

Because of engine trouble at Mather Fld we were about the last crew of our sqdn to arrive on Guam. Some had already flown their first mission when we arrived.

To delay us more on our first mission our crew chief had blown an engine stand into the tail surface of our plane while checking the engine.

While waiting for our plane to be fixed I had a chance to look up some old buddies in the 29th. Saw Mantak and Kuzdrahl & had dinner with them and also learned another that another buddy of ours from Mt. Home, Telio (sic) had been missing in action from their squadron for a couple of weeks.

Went swimming at the beach that afternoon and ran into Mauk (fellow Bomarbian from Mildland Texas)

Took in a show at the Wing area that nite 11 April - 1800 Saw Jackie Cooper, Dennis Day – Claude Thornhill etc in person.

12 April '45

Airplane finally fixed we flew a 2 hr test flight and calibration mission

19 April '45

Flew a practice mission on the Island of Rota about 30 miles from Guam. There were a few Japs on this island and they had some small arms fire. Our Group used the airfield on this island practice bombing missions.

21 April '45

Our airplane "The Lancer" and crew #43 were set for our first mission on the Empire of Japan. The 62nd Sqdn took off about midnight to hit an airfield at Kushira. This mission was lead by Capt. Paquette and crew with Bob Morton lead Bombardier.

Results looked very good. Lots of flak and "The Lancer" got 13 flak holes in the fuselage.

Flying time: 15 hrs.

23 April

Scheduled for mission on an Engine Factory near Tokyo. We lost #3 engine shortly after take off. After saving our bombs we returned to the base. We missed a rough mission with much flak and many fighters. The B-29 flying in position we were scheduled for was badly shot up and had to land at Iwo Jima.

27 April

Mission #2 completed. Bombed Kushira Air Fld again on Kyushu. Got in formation with the 29th Group and was attacked by from 20 to 30 fighters. Main trouble was phosphorus bombs used by the fighters.

Saw Benjamin Powell & crew get hit by a phosphorus bomb as they were flying right off our right wing. The plane started to burn but they managed to hang on until we got out over water. They broke formation and with the left wing burning they started down. We saw 2 men bail out. Later the wing broke off and the plane spun and crashed into the ocean almost 15 miles from the coast of Japan.

About 6 attacks were made by fighters with no damage to our plane. I was put in for one probable fighter. I fired at it at long range when it began a slow nose attack. Both Bob Johnson (Co-Pilot) and I saw a burst of black smoke come from it, then it did a roll and passed down beneath us with no one knowing where it went from there.

Flying time on this mission 15 hrs 55 min.

30 April

Our 3rd Mission. We hit Kokobu Airfield on Kyushira. Were jumped by about 20 Jap fighters. Got in a claim for another fighter. Capt Paquette's crew lost an engine and got a 20mm explosive phosphorous shell threw the nose severely injuring Bob Morton the bombardier. We got a 20mm in the rear & #4 engine & about the same time lost #2 over the target.

It was almost comical at the moment even tho' we were in a serious situation to see our little engineer M/Sgt Hardin get up from the engineering panel to walk to the other side of the plane to see what could do about #2 engine. With his C-1 vest on, his mae west, 45 automatic with belt, canteen & flak suit and helmet he could hardly move, but he did get #2 working again.

No planes in our formation were shot, but many of us had to land at Iwo Jima.

Our #4 engine leaked gas all the way to Iwo. We spent the nite there after getting off in the B-29 we were to have flown back to Tinian since ours had to have a new gas tank & wouldn't be ready for a couple of weeks.

Saw Bob Morton for awhile the next morning who as in the hospital in pretty serious condition. We then flew another B-29 to Tinian. Mac & Yarns stayed at Iwo to guard our plane. While at Tinian I called Bob Ivan who told me where I could find Tony De Falco, Stevenson and Siverly. Had almost a half hour visit with them before they

took us back to Guam in a B-24.

Total Flying Time on that mission was 16 hrs 36 min.

5 May

Super Dumbo Mission. Took off from Guam in another crew's plane at 0900. We patrolled an area several hundred miles from Iwo. That night we back to Iwo and found the island completely socked in. It was our first attempt at a complete (GCA) radar landing but Big Red brought us in within 400 ft of Mt Surabachi and down almost 50 ft above the lights of the runway and made a very nice landing.

We took off from Iwo the next morning and flew back to Guam.  
Total hours for mission was 15 hrs 50 min.

11 May '45

Took off from Guam 0240 Bombed aircraft plant at Kobe. Flak was thick and saw quite a number of fighters. Put in another claim for another and Paul put in claim for one. Landed at Guam with almost nothing but the fumes left in our gas tanks and with our hydraulic system completely shot out. Made a nice landing but no brakes and were towed to our parking ramp.

Total time 16 hrs 40 min.

14 May

Took off from Guam at 0110 to pull a fire raid on Nagoya. Over 500 B-29s from Guam, Tinian and Saipan took part in the raid. The city was burning good when it was our turn over the target. Our formation was very poor but luckily we had very few fighter attacks. Not very much flak on this mission.

16 hrs 05 min Flying time.

17 May

Departed Guam about 1930 for a night fire raid on Nagoya. Lost an engine 180 miles this of Iwo Jima. Savoed bombs and returned to Guam.

Flying time 5 hrs.

19 May

Scheduled for a daylite raid on Tachikawa Aircraft Works near Tokyo but had engine trouble and didn't get off the ground.

21 May

Departed for Iwo Jima about 1000 to navigate fighters from Iwo to Japan. Arrived Iwo in 4 hrs 10 min. After taking in a movie that nite we were ready to hit the sack when the Air Raid warning sounded. We all dived head first in the nearest fox hole. We had hardly gotten settled when it seemed the little island was blowing up. It really looked like the 4th of July with the tracers from all sizes of guns going skyward. Searchlights were scanning the skies and the naval ships in the harbor which was almost a ¼ mile from where we were on a (unknown word) were cutting loose with the all their big guns.

Above all the noise of gunfire we could hear our nite fighters taking off at intervals.

A Jap was hit and set afire high in the air. It came plummeting straight down and hit

the water with a mighty explosion a short way from the shore.

It was all over as soon as it had begun. The next morning 22 May we attempted a take off to escort and navigate P-51 fighters to Japan. Weather was bad so we never got off.

A short distance from where our plane was parked another Jap Betty had hit the ground. I was scattered over a large area and 6 dead Japs were scattered with it, just as they had been thrown from the plane. One Jap Betty had gotten over the island the nite before and had dropped one bomb which caused no damage to the airstrip but it killed one person and injured 4 others.

23 May

Attempted another take off but had bad weather again held us on the ground.

24 May

Got in the air with a formation of 6 B-29's and 96 P-51 fighters but after almost getting to the Jap coast, hit bad weather and to return to Iwo. Flying time: 6 hrs

25 May

4 B-29s including ourselves got off with approximately 96 fighters & took them to the coast of Japan. All the fighters except two left us to strafe & bomb airfields near Tokyo. We circled over one of our own submarines about 20 miles off the coast of Japan as groups of the fighters began to come back each B-29 would navigate different spaced bunches back to Iwo.

We were the last B-29 to leave and had to wait all traggles. One of the last fighters to come back was pretty badly shot up, it was piloted by a full Col. the C.O. of one of the fighter Groups. He had contact with our plane & told us that he was going to have to bailout. We saw him bailout over the sub and his plane hit the water & burn. He wasn't in the water but 3 minutes and the sub had picked him up.

After waiting our allotted time there were only two more fighters came back and we took them back to Iwo.

Flying time was 7 hrs.

26 May

We were to return to Guam about noon. Early that morning B-29's began coming back from the 1st 5000 ft nite fire raid on Tokyo. Many were badly shot up. Besides the fact that some were shot up too bad to land there was a very low ceiling right over our strip. The crews of 3 B-29's had to bail out over the island. We saw 8 men bailout of one.

A short while later a B-29 ditched in the bay between the shore and the navy ships. There were a couple of injured men aboard but the plane made a beautiful ditching and was still floating in the bay when we took off for Guam about 1500 and arrived on Guam in 3 hrs and 50 min.

After hitting the ground the sad news that Capt Paquette's crew (Dick, Joe Medina, Jack Covington, Jerry Levenson & Bill Reith) who were living in the Quonset Hut with

us, had been Missing in Action since the 23rd. It was believed that their plane had blown up over Tokyo on a nite mission.

29 May

Took off from Guam about 0120 for a daytime fire raid on Yokahama with fighter support from Iwo. Formed on the coast of Japan in very bad weather. We managed to get in with two other B-29's and went over the target in a 3 plane formation. The target area was clear and results were good. Our fighters gave our formation good support and at that we had 4 fighter attacks. Flak was quite heavy but inaccurate and we received no bullet or flak holes in "The Lancer."  
Flying time 15 hrs 55 min

5 June

We were selected as the crew in our Grp to take to two Majors from Gen Arnold's staff in the Pentagon on a practice mission on the island of Rota.

We were to drop two 500 lb fire bomb clusters on the island. One of the Major's wanted to drop the bombs so I showed him the whole procedure from pulling the pins on the bombs, calculating all data, setting information in the bombsight – then after starting the bomb run let him take over: results were good. As a crew were highly commended by them which made everyone feel good.  
Flying time 3 hrs 35 min.

7 June

Pulled a fire raid on Osaka. Results were unobserved due to heavy undercast. Bombing was done radar. Flak was light and distant. We had no fighter attacks and no damage. Hit lots of bad weather near Iwo on our return. Had to land at Tinian for gas. Again saw Tony De Foleo, Bob Siverly, Stevenson & Halderman. Flying time 15 hrs 56 min

10 June

Departed Guam about 0100 for a daylite mission, carried 24 highly explosive composite "B" 500 pound bombs. Lost #2 engine on take off. Was afraid to salvo bombs while so close to the ground for fear they would go off under us. Thankful for a 400 ft drop to the ocean a quarter a mile from the end of the runway. We gained enough flying speed to stay airborne. We almost settled in the drink but managed to nurse the Lancer up to 2800 ft on 3 engines & I salvoed the bombs and not one of them went off. We flew around for a couple more hours to lighten our gas load, then returned to the field.

16 June

Again struck at Osaka. It was a maximum effort mission with 520 B-29 from the 3 Mariana island on the anniversary date of the 1st B-29 to hit the Japanese Mainland.

It was a daylite mission and we hit lots weather about 2 hrs before hitting the mainland and bombing was done either by single plane or in a small formation by radar with no results observed. Had to land on Iwo on return for gas.

Flying Time 15 hrs 25 min

20 June

Our first nite mission town of Shizuoka. Took off from Guam approx 2030 Hit very bad weather to & from the target. City was blazing like everything when we dropped our bombs. Saw one fire-ball. No flak or fighter attacks.



Flying time 14 hrs 30 minutes

22 June

Bombed Tama Shima aircraft plant between Kure & Osaka. Flak was meager & had one fighter attack. Weather was bad between here and Iwo and we took off in a downpour of rain. Reports are that 85% of the aircraft works were demolished. Flying time 15 hrs 35 min

26 June

Scheduled to bomb an aircraft plant in Nagoya but due to bad weather over primary target we bombed the secondary which was the city of Tsu. Results were failr. Poor assembly and formation due to weather. Saw a number of enemy fighters and flak was quite heavy and we got a flak hole thru the leading edge of the wing. Saw 36 fighters coming at us at one time and thout' they were Jap at first but found then to be our own. We were told at briefing that we wouldn't have P-51 escort because of the weather but somehow they got thru anyway.

At the assembly point that day – right off the coast of Japan, we saw Jap fighters catch a stragling B-29 and it went down in flames exploding when it hit the water.

Capt Miranda and crew, who had our Group C.O. with them (Col Mundy) were badly shot up. They all bailed out over one of our subs.

We were buddying with them at the time and we learned of their plight we circled once & get their position and reported it to the nearest superdumbo in that area.

Immediately after we had landed back on Guam a plane from the 29th Group had to crash land because it couldn't get its gear down. He belly landed right down the middle of the runway. A beautiful job and no one was hurt. Our flying time was 16 hrs 15 min.

29 June

Nite raid on Nobeoka. Had to feather #2 engine about a half hour from target. Made our run anyway. No flak no fighters. Landed at Iwo to get engine fixed Kept there until 1600 when airplane was ready we returned to Guam. Total mission time 15:20

2 July

Another nite raid on Shimonoseki. Easy mission, going in at 15,000'. Again had trouble with #2 engine and again had to land at Iwo to get an oil leak fixed. Took off from Iwo about 1200 and arrived Guam 1520 Total flying time was 16 hrs 25 min

4 July

Completed another nite raid on city of Tokushima on Shikokbu, very little opposition. Came straight back getting here about 0920. One of our shortest missions 14 hrs 20 min.

Had a big 4th of July celebration in our thatched roof officers club which we had almost completed in our spare time.

7 July

Took off about 2000 for nite fire raid on Kofu. Not much excitement.  
Flying time 14 hrs 14 min

10 July

Another nite fire raid on Gifu. "The Lancer" was out commission and we flew Payne's airplane (Crew 44). In releasing our bombs that nite, some of them hung up and bent up the front bombbay doors. We couldn't close them until over the Pacific & drop down to about 10,000 ft and depressurized. I then went put in the from bombay and managed to get them closed with the emergency system.

On that mission we saw 3 fighters and were in searchlights for a while but no fighter attacks and very little flak.

Flying time 14 hrs 45 min

29 July

We weren't scheduled for a mission from July 10 to 29th. On this nite we started on one but lost an engine a short way from Guam and had to return.

Flying time was 2 hrs & 55 min

2 Aug

Finally got in our 20th mission. A nite raid on Mito. Very little opposition and everything went well.

Flying time 14 hrs 35 min

7 Aug

1 sqdn of 12-13 B-29's from the 39th Bomb Group bombed munitions plant at Toyakawa. It was a daylite mission and about 125 superforts hit and from all indications was an excellent mission. Weather was clear over the target & our bombs looked good.

Flak was meager but very accurate. We got 3 flak holes and most of the sqdn for a few. No Jap fighters were seen and we had P-51 escort from Iwo.

It was on the return trip from this mission when we heard over the radio that the first atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. At first we thought it was some more Jap propaganda but when we landed on Guam we weren't long in finding that the whole thing island knew and was the celebrating had clearly begun. A great time was had by all that nite.

9 Aug

To our disappointment we were scheduled for another daytime mission near Tokyo. We lost another engine shortly after take off. Salvoed our bombs returned to base.

We had been on orders to go on rest leave for several days and we left the next day for Honolulu.