

Diary of a War

WWII Journal
of 1st Lt. Lester A. Lanning
Sept. 17, 1944 – April 12, 1945
(42 of 44 combat missions)



13th Air Force
307th Bombardment Group
424th Bombardment Squadron

THE AIR FORCE

I am a member of the Thirteenth Air Force. Since I have been overseas, all my friends have written and asked, "What is the 13th doing?" because they never hear of us on the air or read about us in the papers. I have been accused of being a "rear echelon" Comberdier so many times that it is beginning to hurt.

You might look up and see which Air Force cleaned out the Solomon, or was knocked about into submission, and which air force was the first to strike Truk, Wewak, Salisapen and the Task Force in Brunel Bay. It wasn't the Seventh or the Fifth, but the Thirteenth.

We are fighting this war from all sides and yet the people at home think we're out here playing marbles. Oh, yes, and then could you find out how many nights we - the 13th - have been bombed in the past few months? If we're so far behind the lines, someone should tell the Japs, for they're wasting an awful lot of bombs.

Lt. F. E. Turner

Dutch East Indies

Copied from the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, Saturday Jan. 25th 1942.

The Crew

17 September 1944

2nd Lt. Norman O. Heille, PILOT, ST. PAUL, MINN.
2nd Lt. WALTER B. HENRY, CO-PILOT, JEROME, IDAHO
2nd Lt. HAL R. JOHNSON, BOMBARDIER, IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO
2nd Lt. LESTER A. LANNING, NAVIGATOR, BRISTOL, CONN.

Corporal LAWRENCE GOOTEE, ENGINEER, DAYTON, OHIO
Cpl. HEDLEY JOHNSON, RADIO-OPERATOR, HIBBING, MINN.
Cpl. JACK L. MAATSCH, ARMORER-GUNNER, FLINT, MICH.
Cpl. HARRY F. SHAWGHNESSY, NOSE GUNNER, Phila., Pa.
Cpl. H. R. COOPER, UPPER-TURRET GUNNER, ROCKVILLE CENTER, L.I., NEW YORK
Cpl. HENRY L. SOLOMAN, TAIL-GUNNER, MEMPHIS, TEXAS

10 APRIL 1945

1st Lt. NORMAN O. HEILLE P.
1st Lt. WALTER B. HENRY C.P. (AND EXTRA SQDN. 1st PILOT)
1st Lt. HAL R. JOHNSON B.
1st Lt. L. A. LANNING N.

TECH. Sgt. LAWRENCE GOOTEE E.
TECH. Sgt. HEDLEY JOHNSON R.O.
STAFF Sgt. JACK L. MAATSCH A-G.
STAFF Sgt. HARRY SHAWGHNESSY G. - ASST. ENG.
STAFF Sgt. H. R. COOPER G. - ASST. R.O.
STAFF Sgt. HENRY SOLOMAN G.

COMMONLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

USA FFE - UNITED STATES ARMY ~~FORCES~~ IN THE
FAR EAST

A.P.U. - AUXILIARY POWER UNIT OR "PLT-PLT"

FEAF - FAR EAST AIR FORCES

CRTC - COMBAT REPLACEMENT TRAINING CENTER

CNT - CELESTIAL NAVIGATION TRAINER

TAS - TRUE AIR SPEED

T.O. - TAKE-OFF

IP - INITIAL POINT

T.P. - TURNING POINT

D.R. - DEAD RECKONING

P.P. - PILOTAGE PINPOINT

LHA - LOCAL HOUR ANGLE

GHA - GREENWICH HOUR ANGLE

SHA - SIDERIAL HOUR ANGLE

GCT - GREENWICH CIVIL TIME

E.TA - ESTIMATED TIME OF ARRIVAL

ATA - ACTUAL TIME OF ARRIVAL

P.D.I. - PILOTS DIRECTIONAL INDICATOR

A.F.C.E. - AUTOMATIC FLIGHT CONTROL EQUIPMENT

C-1 - " " " "

C.E. - CIRCULAR ERROR

H(P)N - HOT (PILOT) NAVIGATOR

A.P.O. - ARMY POST OFFICE

F.P.O. - FLEET POST OFFICE

T.O. - TECHNICAL ORDERS (TAKE-OFF)

T.M. - TECHNICAL MANUAL

V.O.C.O. - VERBAL ORDERS OF THE COMMANDING OFFICER

T.D. - TEMPORARY DUTY

C.O. - COMMANDING OFFICER
 C.Q. - CHARGE OF QUARTERS
 A.G.O. - ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE
 D.S. - DETACHED SERVICE
 D.F.C. - DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS
 D.S.C. - DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS
 Q.M. - QUARTER MASTER
 Q.D.M. - NO WIND MAGNETIC HEADING TO
 BASE - QUICK DIRECTIONAL MEANS;
 G.P. - GENERAL PURPOSE
 P.O.W. - PRISONER OF WAR
 SWPA. - SOUTH WEST PACIFIC AREA
 E.T.O. - EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS
 L.S.T. - LANDING SHIP TANK
 L.C.I. - LANDING CRAFT INFANTRY
 P.T. - PATROL TORPEDO (BOATS) OR
 PRIMARY TRAINER (AIRCRAFT)
 B.T. - BASIC TRAINER
 A.T. - ADVANCED TRAINER
 R.A. - RADIUS OF ACTION
 R.O.N. - REMAIN OVER NIGHT
 D.D.(E) - DESTROYER (ESCORT)
 B.B. - BATTLESHIP
 CL - LIGHT CRUISER
 CA - HEAVY CRUISER
 CVE - CARRIER VESSEL ESCORT
 A.P.I. - ARMOR PIERCING INCENDIARY
 E-6-B - DR COMPUTER
 G-1 - TRUE AIR SPEED COMPUTER
 P.B.Y. - PATROL BOMBER BY CONSOLIDATED

ARMY POST OFFICE ... % POSTMASTER

I

2nd LT. L.A. LANNING O-2060319

U.S.A.A.F

A.P.O. 16493-AB-17

% POSTMASTER

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

II

2nd LT. L.A. LANNING O-2060319

STD. DET. FEAF CRTG

APD 713-1 % POSTMASTER

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

III

2nd LT. L.A. LANNING O-2060319

13th BOMBER COMMAND

APD 719-2 % POSTMASTER

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

IV

1st LT. L.A. LANNING O-2060319

414th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

307th BOMBARDMENT GROUP (HEAVY)

APD 719 % POSTMASTER

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

— MISC. CONTINUED —

THAT REINFORCEMENTS HAD BEEN LANDED BY
SEA AND AIR AFTER CONTINUED CRUSHING AIR
ATTACKS BY THE JAPANESE ON MOROTAI. THAT JAPS
HAD BROKEN THRU THE PERIMETER AND TAKEN
THE STRIPS WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN PUT
OUT OF COMMISSION BY JAP ATTACKS BY AIR.
OTHER CLAIMS OF TOKYO RADIO STATED THE U.S.
BASE HAD BEEN RE-TAKEN WITH THE AMERICAN
GARRISON AND PERSONNEL ANNIHILATED.
CONFUSING PART WAS, NO ONE HERE KNEW
HOW SERIOUS THE SITUATION WAS AND JUST
CONTINUED TO WRITE OUR FOLKS AS IF WE
WERE STILL ALIVE AND LIVING AS USUAL!

(Misc. Notes Con't.)

Around the beginning of the new year (1945), P-51 fighter planes began to arrive to eventually replace the p-47's for escort and attack work. During this changeover, three p-51's took off from a rear base headed for Morotai to arrive at dusk only to find considerable soupy weather around their destination. They could contact the tower at Pitoe strip but could not locate the field in the weather. After quite sometime flying in the general area, they spotted, in the increasing darkness, land and lights marking a runway. They called "Bloomer" tower saying they could see the field and asked for landing instructions which they received. In the confusion, however, they had seen Lolabata strip in the nearby Jap held Halmaheras; the Japs had taken in the whole radio conversation, and lighted their runway in hopes of tricking the new pilots. Two planes landed as Japs began to pour out to their planes; the third pilot saw and realized what happened in time to pull up. The last that was heard from the first two planes was, "My God, look at all the Japs", coming in over the radio.

Japs were found to be very cagey and full of tricks. While in Nadzab, New Guinea, we saw the remains of a blood splattered B-25 that somehow managed to limp back from a low level attack in the Wewak sector. After many daily attacks against the enemy in this area, the Japs had put charges of dynamite in the tops of cocanut trees which they detonated as the planes flew over. This trick was repeated when we had Zamboanga under heavy bombardment. It was not until three B-25's had completely disintergrated in mid-air did they discover that the Japs had installed land-mines in the tree tops which detonated themselves from vibration of the low-level attacking Mitchells.

(Misc. Notes Con't.)

In air-to-air combat against our B-24 formations, we found the Japs also had their tricks. They practiced, mostly unsuccessfully, a great deal of air-to-air bombings of our formations. In Borneo operations they almost solely relied on fighter-borne phosphorus (white) bombs along with the usual straffing attacks, but in the Philippines they tried everything. From High-headon attacks, they would throw bundles of what seemed like steel bars or a bunch of heavy wires with a charge of TNT on each end at us. These "bombs" would fill the sky in front of the formation as they attempted to scatter it before us so that our planes would fly into the stuff. It was one of these baleing-wire gadgets that was believed to have hit Hunter's ship Nov. 7, 1944; he was hit by #4 engine and his wing was cut through almost immediately. In the early Philippine campaigns, Jap fighters were as eager as had ever been reported. they would fly right through our formations and often times on a pursuit-curve, would not break-away until they were 20 yards away. Suicide ramming was uncommon although this practice was noted occasionally.

Freak accidents do occur occasionally. On March (9th) raid over the southern Celebes, due to someone's mix-up in timing, A 5th Group ship was hit by bombs over the target by bombs from a ship in the higher flying 307th Group. The fatally damaged B-24 plunged to earth and all crew members were presumed lost. An alert 307th photographer in a series of pictures, photographed the entire tragic accident; the only one of its type we have ever sustained. During enemy interception, over-eager gunners have often holed other B-24's in our formation, but no one was ever reported hurt.

IF I WERE EVER TO COME OVER AGAIN! -

I WOULD BRING:

1. RADIO, BY ALL MEANS.. MOST ANY PLACE YOU GO THERE
IS ELECTRICITY.. EACH OUTFIT HAS ITS OWN POWER
PLANT.

2. BOOKS FOR RECREATIONAL READING. - TO A
LIMITED DEGREE OF COURSE BUT AT
LEAST AS MANY AS POSSIBLE

3. TOOLS - A SAW, HAMMER, PLIERS, SCREWDRIVER
PLUS A FEW PAIRS OF HINGES, CLASP,
AND PADLOCK.

4. CAMERA, AND PLENTY OF FILM..

5. FLAT-IRON - YOU ARE YOUR PERSONAL LAUNDRY
IN MOST CASES.. AT ANY CASE, THERE
ARE NO PRESSING FACILITIES.

6. SMALL - GASOLINE STOVE

7. HUNTING AND POCKET KNIVES - BOTTLE AND CAN -
OPENERS.

8. AIR MATTRESS, PILLOW, + SHEETS.

ON

Sept. 17, 1944

left the U.S. from
Fairfield Cal. for overseas duty.
Took off with original crew at
0700 in a new B-24-J for John-
Rogers Field, Oahu. - Had little
trouble during the trip except for
a vapor lock in #2 engine during
a fuel transfer that left us on
3 engines and 1800 miles from
land for about 5 nervous
minutes. - Came into Hawaiian
Is. thru weather down to 1000'
with visibility nil. Had visions
of smacking a mountain in the
soup as ETA approached. - But
within 2 minutes of ETA, clouds
broke slightly & there it was to
everyone's relief. Saw only one

2.
other aircraft en-route for a short time and a few ships landed at 1920 very tired after 12:20 flight time. - Used DR and radio when possible, AS by timing, astro-compass heading checks, etc...

Sept. 18, 1944.

Spent the morning in briefing on the next leg of the trip, then the four of us went into Honolulu, to the surf at Waikiki, etc. Tried in vain to locate Capt. Dave Hutchinson since he'd left the islands a few weeks earlier... Spent the evening at the "Hawaiian Town" club, sampled the local excuse for liquor and had a generally

good time..

Sept 19, 1944

Took off from Oahu at 1530 ACT for Canton Is via way of the tiny Palmyra atoll.. Hit three tropical cumulus fronts en route for our first experience with Pacific weather but had little difficulty. As on first leg used D.R. and homing stations within last 100 miles.. Hit Canton at 0146 ACT with flight time of 10:20. — Found the island to be a flat coral atoll 6-10 feet out of water with but one tree (a look-out post). Good strip + maintenance; no fresh water except for drinking only.. Went swimming in a natural

4.

coral pool in evening — later sustained a terrific Tropical downpour that put out all the lights but the storm was of short duration.. Only two women on the entire Is, horses..

Sept. 20th

Took off from Canton at 1829 GCT to land a Nandi in the Fiji Is. at 0128, a 7 hour hop.. We were weather ship on this leg so took numerous Double-Drifts for hourly reports.. Astro-compass heading checks, AS by timing — basic DR all the way and never off, as before, more than a degree or two from Radio bearing when within safe homing range, CTA was 1 minute off! — kept up a running radio fix

off. The Funafuti Radio right of course, surprisingly good for such a distance and accurate for about 1 hour while passing. — After landing at Nandi, went into the native town for a couple of hours, took pictures of the unusual place and people and purchased some souvenir silver jewelry they make painfully or patiently by hand for Mom + Til. Had first taste of American liquor since Wallz-Wallz at the ATC officers' club.. — Crossed the date-line on this leg; left Nandi the next morning, 22 Sept. 44..

22 September 1944

Took-off from Nandi for
 Townsville Australia at 1828 AET by

way of Tontouta, New Caledonia
 Ran into cumulus activity immediately
 off Fiji so flew at 8600', instead
 of the usual 5000', over the cloud
 layer. - Saw very little water
 during the entire trip being over the
 complete undercast, so used sextant
 for sunlines for first time since
 leaving U.S.. Sunlines, DR, and
 radio when possible comprised the
 navigational methods... Picked up
 the Great Barrier Reef thru the
 thinning undercast 50 minutes out of
 destination. Came into Garbutt Field
 via Magnetic Island landing at 0548
 GCT, FLIGHT TIME, 11:20. - "Sold"
 The airplane immediately after
 landing and headed for showers,
 supper, and a bunk...

23 Sept 44

Spent most of the day in Townsville, learning the confusing money system and eating "steak and eggs" both meals.

We walked all over town and outskirts; tried in vain to make the boat trip to Magnetis I and back. - Saw an old Abbott and Costello movie and an amateur hour on the stage for Aussie kids (singing mostly US songs) who, with their particular dialect, gave us quite a bang.

24 Sept.

loaded up crew on an ATC C-47 early in AM for a free ride to Nadzab, New Guinea.

8

At Nadzab found heavy mud,
heat, and the first of the
life you read about in SWPA!
Pitched our tent in the FEAF
CRTC area and began to make
a home.. Continued use of mess
kitts started at Townsville and
long mess and wash lines. —
Had expected mail to be waiting
but there was none...

25 Sept. thru 8 October 1944

Had nothing in
particular to do for the most
part but make a home out of
our tent (called it the Marcus
Whitman Hotel and so labeled
it with a prominent sign.)
Managed to keep busy by building

9.

fussing, sleeping, reading,
firing pistols, hitting, writing
etc. Made a Trip to see over
the originally Jap built road
where we saw much of interest
about ex-Jap installations. etc.

— Food was very poor
as were the sanitary conditions.
Too numerous cases of intestinal
trouble and dysentery. Began
taking Atabrine for Malaria
and developed the characteristic
yellow tint. — Other crews
began to arrive including
those we left at Hamilton
without planes. Welcomed
Jim Kirkwood and crew
whom we thought we'd left
behind; they + most of the

10.

others came all the way
in 45 hours viz ATC C-54 + C-87

— Severe mud, rain, and
heat made for the fundamental
inconveniences continued by flies,
candles, etc; all of which actually
developed a new slant on a
sense of humor.. Began
attending the local FFAF Loren
School for a good six-day
course on use, theory, and
first-echelon maintenance of
equipment. Received one of the
13 "excellent" ratings given in
the class of 50.. Had a few
Intelligence lectures on SWPA war,
a session at the gunnery school
etc.... Became aware of the
appreciation of the simple things

11.

such as a letter, a cot, or how good a thing like a cold glass of unchlorinated water could be. — Spent two days and one night in the jungle eating palm cabbage etc., building a hut to sleep in and battling mosquitoes and everything else that crawls (which is practically everything) — .. Anxiously await mail which hasn't yet come thru. Haven't flown either but am ready & willing to get at it; flying weather pretty good all week and there were numerous 24's, fighters, & transports continuously. Jim Kirkwood went to hospital with an appendicitis attack Oct. 4th but

They didn't operate, and he's OK. in spite of the difficulty we had getting him there...

13 OCTOBER 1944

1ST COMBAT MISSION

FROM: NADZAB, NEW GUINEA...

TO: BOIKEN PLANTATION, WEWAK, NEW GUINEA..

OUR FIRST MISSION, AND THOUGH WE HAD NO OPPOSITION IT GAVE US ALL QUITE A THRILL.. FLEW UP THE VALLEY TO THE COAST JUST SOUTH OF WEWAK THEN THE SIX SHIP FORMATION TURNED LEFT TO THE TARGET. - WE BOMBED TROOP CONCENTRATIONS JUST IN FROM THE COAST among PALM TREES WITH NO VISIBLE RESULTS EXCEPT BOMB BURSTS AND FALLING PALMS.. WE LABELED THE BOMBS WITH NAMES ETC. OFFERING THE JAPS THE BEST FROM THE FOLKS BACK HOME..

BOMB LOAD: 8-1000# G.P.'S

FLIGHT TIME: 4^h:15^m.

ON THE 17th OF OCTOBER WE LEFT F.E.A.F. FOR NOEMFOOR, BEING ASSIGNED TO THE 13th AIR FORCE AND LATER, THE 307th BOMBARDMENT GROUP, 424th BOMBARDMENT Squadron.

WE FERRIED A B-24-J TO NOEMFOOR VIA WAY OF BIAK WITH PASSENGERS. — BECAUSE OF THE INEFFICIENCY IN MADZAB OPERATIONS AND THE FACT THEY DIDN'T WANT A "GREEN" CREW TO MAKE THE TRIP UNESCORTED, WE WERE DELAYED 4 DAYS ON OUR TAKE-OFF. (NUMEROUS CREWS NOT USED TO PACIFIC WEATHER, TERRAIN, CHARTS, ETC. HAVE BEEN LOST ON THAT TRIP... THREE LATER 424th REPLACEMENT CREWS REPORTED AN AIR-COLLISION AND LOSS OF TWO B-24'S IN WEATHER AS THEY WERE MAKING THE HOP.)

OUR NEW HOME SEEMED LIKE A 100% IMPROVEMENT ON HEAVEN AFTER HAVING LIVED THREE WEEKS IN THAT NEW GUINEA HELL-HOLE. — EVERYBODY WAS VERY GENIAL AND SEEMED SINCERELY GLAD TO SEE US (THO PERHAPS ACTUALLY IN AN ULTERIOR SORT OF WAY!) — BEDS WERE SCARCE AND I WAS PUT IN WITH MAJOR JOHN A. VANDERPOEL, COMMANDING OFFICER FROM LITCHFIELD, CONN.. MADE ACQUAINTANCE OF OTHER CONN MEN, LT. JAMES FIELDING OF BRIDGEPORT, LT. AUBREY OF NORWICH, LT. ED. SHUSTER OF , AND A FEW OTHERS. — NOT BAD FOR ONE SMALL SQUADRON FOR A SMALL STATE SO FAR AWAY! — TENTS WERE PITCHED OVER CORAL (CRUSHED) FLOORS, NO PLATFORMS AS LUMBER WAS SOMETHING VERY RARE, OFFICERS TENTS HAD ELECTRIC LIGHTS, MESS WAS PRETTY FAIR AND JUST LIKE...

NADZAB MENUS OF DEHYDRATED BEEF + POTATOES DAY AFTER DAY. THE DRINKING WATER WASN'T AS BEFORE HEAVILY CHLORINATED BUT PURIFIED BY SOME OTHER "PRACTICALLY" TASTELESS PROCESS. THERE WERE IMPROVISED SHOWERS INSTEAD OF JUST AN OPEN SPRING FED PIPE FOR WASHING... IT RAINED AT LEAST ONCE IN A HEAVY DOWNPOUR DAILY, BUT NIGHTS WERE COOL EVEN AFTER BROILING DAYS MAKING FOR PRETTY FAIR SLEEPING...

USED TO DREAD THOSE NIGHT TAKE-OFFS WITH FAR OVERLOADED AIRPLANES (TIMES AS MUCH BY 15000# OR MORE - MANY 70000# GROSS WEIGHT TAKE-OFFS AT NIGHT).. WITH HEAVY BOMB LOADS AND BOMB-BAY TANKS, PLANES TOOK-OFF ON AN LN-EVEN TOO SHORT RUNWAY OFTEN SKIMMING THE OCEAN WATER WHERE THE STRIP CAME TO AN ABRUPT END. MANY TIMES PROPS WERE SEEN TO TICK THE SURFACE AS PAROTS FOUGHT FOR ALTITUDE; MANY, TOO MANY, DIDN'T MAKE IT AT ALL...

SQUADRON WAS HITTING BALIK PAPAN OIL REFINERIES IN BORNEO WHEN WE ARRIVED, BUT WE JUST DIDN'T HAPPEN TO MAKE A LOADING LIST.. JAPS WERE PUTTING UP 40 INTERCEPTORS AND HEAVY AND INTENSE FLAK WHICH WAS TAKING AN UNPRECEDENTED TOLL ON OUR AIRCRAFT, ESPECIALLY SINCE CRIPPLES HAD SO MANY HUNDREDS OF MILES TO LIMP TO A.D.S. BASE.. LT. MCGINNIS AND CREW WENT DOWN ON THE MISSION OF 18 OCTOBER ALL WERE LOST... FIRST LOSS AFTER THE...

22 OCTOBER 1944 — MISSION #2.

FROM: NOEMFOOR

TO: CEBU, PHILIPPINES..

MY FIRST MISSION WITH THE 13th
AIR FORCE AND THE 13th AIR FORCE'S FIRST
STRIKE ON THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS.. FLEW
AS TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT NAVIGATOR FOR JIM
ROWE'S CREW TAKING OFF AT 0200
CUMULUS BUILD-UPS OVER THE AIR-DROME AT
CEBU FORCED US TO HIT THE SECONDARY, THE
RUNWAY AT UPON A/D ON MACTAN ISLAND ...
NO ESCORT, NO INTERCEPTION, NO FLAK... DID
CELESTIAL AT NIGHT; DR AND PILOTAGE BY DAY.
RAN INTO WEATHER DOWN TO 500' NORTHWEST OF
AND TO BASE ON RETURN BUT FINALLY FOUND
OUR WAY IN. OK. (NO HOMING-BEACON OPERATING.)

BOMB LOAD - 5-1000[#] G.P., 1-500[#] G.P.

FLIGHT-TIME - 15:30