

Diary of Lester J. Nichoson

Radio Operator



July 11, 1944 to November 2, 1944

35 Missions

Diary of Lester J. Nichoson
Home: Toledo, OH
Radio Operator / B-24
731 Crew - 787th BS - 466th BG

*The following entries are transcribed as best they can be interpreted from
the handwritten diary. Some spelling may be incorrect, but this is how
the words actually appear in the diary for all 35 missions.*

Tuesday, July 11, 44

1st Mission - Munich

We awoke at 11:45 to eat at 12:15 -Briefing at 12:50 and take off at 4:30. Our bomb load was 3000 GP. We took off under a very low ceiling and had bad weather all the way - bombing was by PFF and 1100 planes hit the center of Munich. Two of our bombs hung up and Harrie released them at 20,000 ft with a screw driver. We had P51, P47 and P38 escort which was very good.

We had considerable flak but due to chaf it was not too accurate. Returning we ran low on gas and barely made it to a RAF fighter base. For a while we thought we were going to ditch in the channel. Our inboard engines were sputtering when we reached the field. Landed on two engines. The field was Luckham.

I called on the radio to our field and had them send a truck. Limies gave us tea and sandwiches. They thought our planes were swell. Arrived back here at 19:20. We used all the runway and grass at the end taking off. Reason gas leaked was nice flak hole in gas tank.

July 12, 44

Mission 2 - Munich again.

Awoke at 06:00 to eat at 0630 and brief at 7 - take off at 9. Weather-overcast, bomb load 3,000 lb demos and incens. A very sleepy crew took off through a heavy mist. Harries cousin was a crew chief on the plane. Hit enemy coast at 11:10. We hit flack at Brussels and several other places. At 12:40 discovered oil leak in no 1. We were forced to abored. We had no escort returning and Holden took us around Flak. We made it safely though.

July 13, 44 Thursday

Mission Saarbrucken Ger.

Bomb load 6,000 GP. We awoke at 01:30 to eat at 02:00 and brief at 02:30-take off at 05:45 to bomb marshalling yards. We took off into 10/10 clouds and assembled at 18,000. Hit enemy coast at 0307. We hit flak at various points but nothing serious. Bombing was

by PFF so couldn't see them hit. Flak over the target was plenty rough, we lost a swell bunch of fellows. I knew Frank Church the RO real well.

July 17, 44

Mission 4 Saarbrücken again

Awoke at 02:30, eat at 03:00 and brief at 03:30 to take off at 05:30. Take off was into 5/10 - 7/10 cloud covering. The target was the same as yesterday. Some hit airfields on the edge of town. Returning we ran low on gas so broke formation at the coast. We landed OK. The Flak was very plentiful today.

July 17, 44

5th Mission - No Ball

Allerted 16:00 to take off at 18:00. It was a robot base in France. Bombs dropped through no clouds and hit the target on the nose. It was near Pao De Calaro and Lille area. Flak was intense and very very accurate. Two planes on our left went down on fire. One our planes ditched in the channel. We didn't get hit at all and made it OK. Landed at 21:30 and got to barracks at 23:00. Wrote a letter and was called at 0130 - No sleep.

July 18, 44

6th Mission - to the second front of France.

Allerted 0130 - eat at 02:00 brief at 02:30 take off at 0600. The target 5 miles East of Caen. We carried 40 cluster bombs (A.P.) Took off into clouds and flew at 16,000. We hit Jerrie troop instalations. Only three Flak guns at target but on the way back the damn Limmies shot hell out of us. Nearly went into a spin from prop wash. The crew straffed enemy troops. Saw a lot of scarcrows today. I dropped rocks on target. Got home in time to be alerted again. I've went nearly 48 hours without washing or sleep.

Allerted for Rotterdam but was scrubbed.

July 19, 44

7th mission - Kemston, Ger.

Me 262 - 163 fighter Factory. Buzz Bombs alerted at 0130 - eat at 02:00 brief at 0300 take off at 05:30. Bomb load 52-100 lb incen. Bombed PFF. No Flak at target but hit al little at other spots. Encountered Me 109s and 190's. Whole squadron in front of us was nearly shot down. We had 51s and 38s. Twenty min. after target we lost no 2 engine. I thought we were done for awhile. I dropped two rocks on target again. The crew dropped smoke bomb. We landed in 10/10 clouds and 500 ft ceiling on three engines. This makes 7 missions in 8 days.

Norwich was bombed when we got back. We could see flashes out here. Jerry really had it. Time 23:00.

July 20, 44

8th mission - Eisenach Ger.

Engine factory. Boy we were tired awoke at 0130 - eat 02:30 - brief 0300. took off at 07:00. Flack light but accurate. Fighters were around again but we were lucky. Temp -27. Rocky got PO'd at another pilot and swerved at him, we got the worst of it as we hit his prop wash and nearly hit another plane. We were lucky dogs.

July 21 (day off)

They went to Munich an got shot to hell. I lost a couple of good buddies from the barracks. I think they may have bailed out - (I hope)

July 24, 44

9th mission

awoke 02:30- eat 03:00 - brief 03:30 take off 05:30. Bomb load 32-260 lb Frag. an overload. The target is the front lines in France. The Weather was excelent. We had a runaway prop but didn't turn back as we wanted to make this one. I kept feathering the prop so we wouldn't go over the target on three eng. Flak was light but accurate. The plane in back was hit and blew up - no chutes. They had new flack it was red bursts.

July 24, 44

10th mission - Front lines-St. Lo

3,000 planes bombed an enemy artillery installation 1 1/3 Sq. miles. We carried 32 - 260 lbs. Frags. Total 14.560 tons. We flew deputy lead for the first time. awoke at 0:200. Very little flack and lots of fighters.

July 26 scrubbed**July 28, 44**

11th mission - Paris

awoke at 0:100

We lost a crew when they crashed on end of runway. The pilot was Vogolls. We made the target but it was too cloudy so we brought the bombs back. The target was a bridge. Little flack for a change. I picked up some swell music on the way back. We got a swell write up on St. Lo raid. We are still very lucky.

July 29, 44

12th mission - Breman

Lots of flack. Awoke at 0:300 and took off at 06:30. Bomb load 20 - 250 frags. Hit enemy coast at 10:14 and flack. Temp was -24. This was our second cluster mission. We

had a K20 camera and caught a picture of a B-17 ditching. I sent in an SOS for him - hope it helped, I think it did.

Aug 1st

13th mission - Caen France

awoke at 07:30, took off at 10:30. Clouds were 10/10. We didnt drop our bombs as it was too cloudy. Baynes nearly hit another plane. We were pretty flighty when we got back. Heard swell music coming home. got home at 13:30. Not too much flack. We are still lucky.

[No date listed by Lester Nichoson in diary.]

14th mission - No ball

We were alerted at 14:00 and briefed at 1430. Took off at 16:30. The target was near Abby Villo. We hit enemy coast at 19:35. We hit target on the nose with 20 - 260 GPs. Fighter support was P-51s. I saw about 12 bursts of flak. Coming back we hit a low ceiling and as we were low on gas we let down fast. First ones in for a change.

[No date listed by Lester Nichoson in diary.]

15th mission - No ball in France.

Target SW of Abbyville a flying bomb base. Briefed at 13:00 took off at 1600. We missed flak at the target but picked up a couple of holes in no. three cowling. The country around the target was riddled with bomb craters. We had [*word unreadable*] fighter support.

[No date listed by Lester Nichoson in diary.]

16th mission. Rostock Ger.

40 miles N. of Berlin a hot spot. Bomb load 10 - 500 lbs GP. Target was a 262 factory. We awoke at 0600 took off at 09:30. Plenty of clouds and mist. The route took us over Kiel. The lead Sq. was hit by jet fighters - knocked hell out of them. We hit the target solid then we got hit solid by flak. I saw a lot of smoke screens today, must be something there. We lost a lot of planes today. Swell music coming back. Got a 48 hr. pass - stayed home.

We missed a couple of hot missions to Hamburg. The crew who flew our plane got two Purple Heart victims - it might have been us. Heard some bad news about some of our old buddies at Biggs.

Aug 9

We were scratched. Saw them come back though. Saw them take a dead Bombardier from a plane where three were wounded. Our sq lost two full crews and a lot injured. - Fighters did it.

Aug 11, 44

17th mission - Strassburg Ger.

Took off at 1100, hit enemy coast at 12:20. 40 miles from target no 2 began smoking and no 3 wasn't far behind but England was. We decided to turn around. We had no fighter escort but coming back over Belgium we decided to bomb Brussels by ourselves. Later we wished we hadn't cause they shot flak at us. We got the hell out of there and dropped bombs in the channel.

[No date listed by Lester Nicholson in diary.]

18th mission - Front lines of France

Awoke at 08:00 took off at 10:50 CAVU. We were instructed to bomb roads, bridges ect to cut off escape routes. Our target is S.E. of Caen. There was some flak as usual. Lyn caught one burst in front of him. We dropped on two targets today for the first time. It was hard to tell just how good we did as the target was surrounded by woods.

Aug 15

19th mission. Tarvoux France

Awoke at 0415 - took off at 07:22. Target an airfield. C.A.V.U. P51s all the way. 4 ¾ hrs on 0/2. We hit plenty of flak as per usual. We missed the target and our bombs hit a little French Village. The town was blown to hell. Gosh I felt bad about it as it was a mistake. Some bombs did hit the airfield.

Aug 16, 44

20th mission Magdaburg Ger.

Awoke at 03:15, brief at 0400 take off 0600. Swell breakfast. The target was a Junkers factory 60 miles S of Berlin and 30 miles SW of Brunswick. We hit the factory and also plenty of flak. On the way back the lead Navigator got fouled up and took us over 7 towns including Brussels. It was all intense and accurate as all hell. One burst went through the Flight deck and that is too close. They had fighters again. Lucky us.

Aug 18

We lost a crew on the last one who had a private room. We move in. - 100th mission party with Glen Miller and 98 kegs of beer.

Aug 24

21st mission Hanover Ger.

We were awoke at 0330 to eat and brief at 0415. We had three hours of sleep last night. I slept before take off. Took off at 07:15. 4 hrs on 0/2 formed at 22000 ft. We hit the enemy coast near Kiel. The really routed us good for a change. Right around a lot of flock - most of it is to one side. Bremen and Hamburg are among the towns.

Shortly after we are in enemy territory we loose no 3 and 1-4 are running hot. We cut short of the target and dump our bombs on some railroad tracks running into Hamburg. We headed back by ourselves with a P51 by our side. Holden did a swell job of navigating. The country is full of fighters in fact they hit the B17s but did not poor little us. Little friend is Good friend. Landed on 3 engines and two of them not so good at 13:30. We lead whole 8th Air Force back. Lady Luck still rides with us.

Aug 25

22nd mission Lee Beck Ger.

FW plant awoke at 0300 briefed at 0400 Airborne at 0700. It was an ordinary mission through the North Sea with a few flak bursts near shore. When we hit the target it was like a hornets nest, all of a sunned flak was everywhere. The bombs fell short of the P.T. but we hit the railroads tracks leading into it. Major Elliot Lead us and Col Steadman buzzed us in his new P47.

Aug 27

23rd mission Berlin

Target was Airfield on edge of town. We routed over N Sea but the weather closed in so a 360 was in order. Twenty five min later the CP decided to do another 360 and hit Kiel. I picked up a recall from Wing so we turned around. Fighters were out again. We hit Flak at a Naval base in Holland. Landed at 17:45. Today was first mission in our old ship since it was shot up.

Aug 30

24th mission No ball France

We awoke at 05:20 amid rain and no ceiling for take off at 0800. We took off in the rain again. Temp at alt was -28. The target was Villo L'Hopital a very active Buzz bomb site. Just after Bombs away we hit a cloud bank and nearly ran into another ship. Luck was with us and we landed in the sun shine at 13:30. We went to see about the Flak Home and now we leave Friday 1st for three days of rest - Hot Dog.

The home is 4 miles from Wroxham. The chow is swell and they have any game you want besides sailboat and three row boats. Holden and I got caught in a storm and crawled into a straw stack till two a.m. walked 4 miles to camp had hot coffee and pie. Hit the sack of 03:40. 3rd got some rest.

Sept 8, 44

25th mission Karbruke

Take off 07:30, we were to hit marshalling yards. It was real foggy we couldnt see the end of the runway. Bomb load was 5 1000lb GPs. The clouds were so high we flew up to 29,000 ft. Temp was between 40-55 below. It was clear over Paris so got a good veiw of town. The ship in front of us went into a spin and the bombs fell right through the doors. The doors nearly hit us.

We nearly ran out of gas and 0/2. Those bombs really made a blast and smoke. We managed to pick up a few flack holes. 13 ships aborded from lack of gas or 0/2. It was an 8 ½ hr. trip.

Sept 10

26th mission Luxomberg

take off 07:00 bomb load 10- 500 lb clusters of incenderies, target truck and mobile plant. It was cloudy and cold -35. We hit Flak in 3 places. Once they picked us out and just kept shooting closer till the next one would get us - it never came - good old 51. We saw some Jerry jet propelled planes West of us. Some Sqdrans hit the town next to target as it was too cloudy. Just acrossed the Rhine in the valley we saw huge columns of smoke where P51s had strafed - Harries mask froze and he almost kicked off. Sweated gas as usual. I saw a B-24 crack up and burn - no chutes as he was too low. another one hit near the runway and the Ghost blew a tire on the runway. They lost 45 ships today.

Got our four new gunners.

[No date listed by Lester Nichoson in diary.]

Gas run.

Les and I were leaving for the Pub when they caught us. We carried 45s helmets ect. We took off at 20:30 and landed in Welford, the first approach we came in on the left so Baynes gunned it about 10ft from the ground. Next time we hit hard and the tower told him to gun it, he was blinded by flares and landing lights so he really gunned it and we ran off the runway into a wheat field, tore hell out of the nose wheel. Slept in the plane.

Next morning loaded 180 5 gal cans and took off for Clorstres, France. I could really see some swell sights as it was low altitude. Could see results of bombings. The field was bombed pretty well so we landed between the craters. Saw blasted hangers, Me 109's ect.

Got some swell souvenirs. Later learned We had bombed this place. There were snipers here. I go to the hosp.

Sept 18 - 44

We haul gas to Orleans Fr. We have 1500 gals in the bomb bays. I was plenty scared as the fumes were thick as the devil.

We landed at 14:00. I gave some guy 2 flags for a ride on his motorcycle. I got some French coins ect. This base bombed the field on the 100th mission. Saw some high ranking FFI.

We had two planes hit here in a practice run. 21 out of 26 men killed. Ulmo crew with Joe and Hudson were among them. It is too bad as they were good boys. The rest of the crew is pretty well broken up.

Sept 21 - 44

Lille

Same old story but we stayed all night. When we took off Baynes had to rev. it up but when he let go it went sideways, all most hit another ship, by this time we are doing 75 mph. She straightened out $\frac{1}{4}$ down the runway so he had to draw 55 at 12 mph. She lifted but we hit a barbed wire fence at the end of the runway. Nearly went down. It jarred a hose loose in the gas line and gas was all over the bomb bays.

Saw flooded areas along the coast. The limeys are using our equip.

The Col let us go to town so 4 of us went. We felt pretty good after some beer cognac, Champagne ect. These folks are better than the limeys ever were.

Rocky and I lost the other two so we saw the town together. Boy what fun. I got a bottle of old champagne and brought it home. We took off at 09:30 and got home at 10:30.

Sept 23

Gas run St. Dezier

Same old story but we stayed all night again. We all went to town to eat supper, not bad considering they were at war so long. Baynes nearly got drunk for the first time in his life. This town is too full of GI's to have any fun. We had to sleep in the plane and darned if it didn't rain. In the morning we went to a bombed out building and built a fire to dry out. At noon we all at the mess tent. They had C rations or stew. It was better than some chow I've eaten here.

Took off at 14:00 and got back at 15:45. The controls were locked on take-off. Wow.

Sept 28

Gas run to St. Dezier France

We took off at 10:30 and arrived about 1300 as it was diverted because of weather. Baynes didn't get much above 800 ft. all the way. Les says he took a shower in the bomb bay crossing the channel we were so low. Four of us flipped to see who would stay with the ship while the rest went to town. Les lost. Holden and I bought some wine to bring back then we had some to drink in town. Left town about 2100 on two bikes we had borrowed, Holden dropped the wine on the sidewalk and it broke. Tried to swipe a French flag and nearly got caught.

Two Day Pass

Went to London, saw Westminster Abbey, London Bridge, Palace ect. Stayed at Imperial Hotel in Russel Square. Some parts of town is completely bombed out for blocks. Ludwig Gyrock. I saw part of a building with a bat tub on the third floor yet. Some things would be funny if it werent so tragic. Jerry still sends over a few buzz bombs.

Oct 5th

Mission 27 Airfield Padenborn Ger

Awoke at 04:00 chow at 04:30, briefing at 05:00. It was our first trip with the new gunners besides Ricky was flying I.P. with another crew. We took off at 08:00 in a driving rain, thought for awhile it would be scrubbed. We flew over Dummer Lake and hit the target., came back without seeing over 20 bursts of flack. No two engine concked out on landing which made it tough. All in all it was a very easy mission, taking 5 ½ hrs. Temp at altitude -48, bomb load 10 - 500lb GP's. The old crew is sweating out the D.F.C. and we are also wondering how many more we will have to do. Gosh we are lucky.

Oct 9, 44

28th jaunt Mission to Coblenz Ger

Awoke at 07:30 to take off at 11:30. They wanted us to hit marshalling yards. It was a good trip, not too much flack. It was pretty cool as per usual -45. This was the first time they gave us C rations. Imagine stew at 24,000 ft, the darn stuff froze. Was talking to Red Cross girl at interegation, she is from Perrysburg. Also found out it is 35 missions - The D _ _ _ Col has the idea there isnt enough replacements. Im tired tonight-must be getting old

Oct 15

29th trip Meinham Ger

We awoke at 0300 and briefed at 0500 to take off at 0730. We carried 10 - 500 GPs. The target was oil refineries on the edge of town. The weather was good for a change and we could see the target area good. The bombs hit on, in and across the river at the edge of the target and a lot actually were on it. The flak was fairly accurate but not too heavy. It was cold, -45. Nothing very exciting and we landed at 14:30. Gosh I hope they are all like this.

Oct 17, 44

30th Cologne Ger

We awoke at 0200 to take off at 0630. Our target was the Ford plant at Cologne. Had fried eggs again for breakfast. For awhile it looked like we wouldn't take off as we had no replacements then no 4 super charger ran away on us. We finally made it but the navigator couldnt find the formation. I gave him a general idea of the location and he finally found it. It was too cloudy to see the results of the bombing and with the flack like it was I didnt look too hard. They must have used the instructors today. One ship next to us went down with an engine on fire. It was Saunders crew, hope they make it. There was a lot of fighters today. Brownie swore me would shoot one down but he didnt. He really tried hard though. We made it back good and fast landing at 12:30. This one should give me the D.F.C. Five more to go.- I start sweating. This one was a little too rough to suit me. Some reporter asked me to make a statement for the paper.

Oct 19, 44

31 Neinz Ger

We were awoke at 0330 to take off at 07:30 but take office was set up to 0900 when we did finally get going. It was plenty chilly today - between -46 -55 below. As usual we had an old wearie ship that tried three times before it decided to leave the ground. Things went pretty good till we hit the IP then the flak really came. We got a few holes in the nose one near Baynes foot. The worst flak in a long time. I just copied the Bombs Strike when Baynes told me to go to the waist and help the boys. Jordan had froze up and was shaking plenty, other than that he couldnt move. Rad and Joe didnt know what to do. I tried changing his heated suit plug which helped some. I then broke the ice off his face and wiped it with my scarf. Over the inter-phone I told Baynes to drop down and come home alone as I was afraid of frostbite. I told Rad to unbutton his suite front with me and put Jordans feet next to our skin as they were the worst. In this manner we came home at 15:10. The Doc put the boy in the hospital but he doubts if he is hurt very bad which makes me very happy. This ends no 31, only four more to go. I pray we can make them.

Oct 21, 44

32nd mission Hamm Ger

They awoke us at 07:30 to take off 10:30. We had a little trouble getting off, the big bird didnt want to leave. Our load was rather heavy 16 x 250lb GPs and 4 x 500lb incen. Things went alright till we hit the IP then flak was everywhere at once, the worst in a long time. Lucky for us we didnt get hit. At the same time another plane nearly hit us. He came up under our bomb bay nearly 10ft from us. If Baynes had moved either or any way we would have had it. After Bello experience I was plenty scared. Brown, Les and Jordan all yelled at once to go up but we couldnt understand them fortunatly. Later they boys said if they could have, they would have dropped the bombs on them to save us. After that things went pretty good and we landed at 1630 very tired. Had a shot at interigation and noticed we got alerted again tomorrow. God how I am sweating them out. Only three more to go so lets get going.

10/25/44

33rd mission Barttrop Ger

Awoke at 0730 to take off at 10:30 but takeoff was postponed an hour. It was an ordinary hop till we reached the target - a synthetic oil plant in the center of town. About the time we got there the flak started. This was the most flak since St Lo and it was right in there. Black and white burst with a lot of scarecrows. One crew went down and several more brought back wounded and otherwise. I will never see how we made it without any holes but we did and landed at 1730. As usual we are up again tomorrow but I don't care as I want to get through so I can relax for a change.

Oct 30, 44

34th mission Hamburg Ger.

They awoke us at 0700 to take off at 1000. Things went as briefed till we hit the enemy coast. There we hit a cloud bank up to about 29,000 ft. We tried to go above, below and through but no dice. The formation broke up because we couldnt see our wing ships. That I didnt like cause sometimes those big birds hit each other. What a picnic we would have been for Jerry. We cut it a little short and started back. The 51's tried to herd us together like sheep but no go, we were afraid of the clouds. This was the navigators last one and he didnt want to take any chances. The flak was coming up in nice size bursts all this time besides it was plenty cold. -40 to -50. Thank God we made a good guess and found our way home safely ahead of the formation. They hit more flak, one ship came back over the North Sea and landed on two engines 3-4. A beautiful job he did too. Well only the big one left and I may get it in tomorrow, at least I hope so. This was only a 7 hour hop but I feel it was more than I used to the 8 ½ hr ones. And so to bed.

35 Nov 2/44

35th Bern Ger [Note: Probably meant Nirm, Germany, town outside Gelsenkirchen.]

They awoke us for the last time at 0700 and took off at 10:30 into a clear sky. We had 16 x 250 demos. We sweated plenty as any mistake now and all before us would have gone for naught. We hit the enemy coast at 1235 and dropped the eggs very uneventful - then it happened. Flak and fighters came at once. I saw a 190 knock a 51 down then get it himself. One 24 exploded and at 3 oclock a 262 jet plane was getting it from 4 P51s. Here we are in the middle of it all. One of the new gunners shot a 109 down - he feels pretty good I imagine. The fighters stayed with us all the way to the Zider Zee and we were wishing they would go away. However we made it OK and landed a little after 1500. One of the planes that went down I hear and no chutes. I took 4 shots after this one and now I aint never going to fly no mo!

We had a party tonight. Whiskey, tounge, chicken and all the rest. Baynes and Seymour got drunk and passed out. Its all over now. Hot Dawg.

The End.

Lester J. Nichoson, born May 30, 1924, lived in Toledo, Ohio, where he returned following his term of service. Lester was a City of Toledo fireman. He died on May 25, 1976. He was survived by his wife Mae, a son, and two daughters.