

MOS 2756—Radio Operator: SSGT Harvey Landis

I went to the draft board and asked for immediate induction, that is to say I was drafted in December of 1943. I was sent to Camp Upton, which during WWII, was primarily used as an induction center for new draftees. After three or four days of testing we were transferred to Sheppard Field, Texas, it was then I realized I was in the Air Force. I wanted to fly but did not qualify since I am color blind. My choices were Gunner, Mechanic, or Radio Operator; I chose Radio and hoped to utilize that skill after the war. I attended Radio School in Sioux Falls, SD for five months from June 1944.

We were given crew assignments and transferred to Alamogordo, New Mexico. When I first saw a B-29 on the runway I didn't think it would get off the ground. On my first two flights I was so air sick; by my third flight I was OK. We picked up a B-29, as a crew, in Lincoln, NE and flew over to Mather Field in California.

We arrived on Guam at night and there was no Mess Hall yet. We were a Replacement Crew; the crew we replaced had crashed in the ocean on a Training Mission; one man survived in the water for days; once rescued, he was sent home. When we arrived, my pilot, navigator, and I were told to fly into combat with another crew for our initial training; we all flew in different planes. There we were, flying with a strange crew, which did not make us happy. Because of this training mission, the three of us had an additional mission credit. Our crew was never assigned to one plane but flew 21 Missions in various planes.

As a Radio Operator I used Morse Code...probably about 25 words per minute; from take-off to landing we were to be on radio silence; we lost Radio twice (more about that later). My Radio station didn't have any views/windows. Since I had to monitor the radio for anything important, I was not on intercom until we were close or over the target. Once we were five minutes, or so, out of Japan I was again off intercom and back monitoring the radio; I would also monitor the bomb bays. One time there was a bomb hung up – the bomb later fell off and hit the bay door...the whole plane shook! After sustaining the hit, the bomb bay door wouldn't close – we had to land on Iwo with the Bomb Bay open.

On one occasion we were escorting some P-51s to Okinawa – communication between our B-29 and the P-51s was VHF, but on this occasion he could hear us but we couldn't hear him; I crawled back by the Left Gunner to check some wires under the floor boards but I couldn't resolve the issue.

When we flew at those lower altitudes, it felt like we were fighting a different war. After bombs away, with the bays still open, a Zero passed right under our open bomb bays – it felt like time stood still as the Zero's Pilot and I looked at each other – I couldn't speak! I wanted to alert the Tail Gunner; but the Zero continued on and dove under us.

We used as a Radar Counter-Measure, aluminum foil which came in a roll and strips. This was used by the British originally and was called "window" by the British; we called it "chaff". There was a hole in the floor back by the Putt-Putt for a camera, the Chaff would be thrown out that hole to interfere with Radar. I once missed the hole and the Chaff blew into the back of the aft compartment – our Ground Crew Chief said the back of the plane looked like a Christmas Tree!

On days off we would go to the Naval base to swim. We also went to the beach once for 12-men life raft training (just our crew).

Editors Note: Fellow crew member Dick Kurtz (CFC) gave Harvey a copy of his mission logs; I will intersperse those notes amongst Harvey's recollections.

Kurtz – First Mission – May 10, 1945 – K-59:

Our objective was the Otake oil refineries on Honshu in the largest B-29 raid to date. 400 planes participated. We loaded the turrets in a downpour of rain and took off at 02:35. The line up of planes for takeoff was really impressive.

Kurtz – Second Mission – May 14, 1945 – K-55:

The roughest part here was the briefing; they had everyone scared with their stories about flak and fighters and fireballs. We were ready for a rough mission to "flak alley" – a daylight fire raid on Nagoya, toughest target in the Empire. The target was a mass of smoke and flames when we left. Flak was meager.

Kurtz – Third Mission – May 17, 1945:

Back to Nagoya on a 500 plane night fire raid. We saw two fireballs – managed to evade them at over 350 miles per hour. Listened to beautiful music from Saipan on the ride home.

Kurtz – Fourth Mission – May 24, 1945 – K-67:

Target: the heart of Tokyo, including the railroad center in another night fire raid. Radar wouldn't work on the ride up but I helped Tell to fix it as we sweated over a brand new airplane on its first mission. Searchlights and all other kinds of lights were bursting all around us and were really rough on the nerves. Landis' throwing out RCM saved us from the searchlights which really caught some of the boys.

At the IP on our Fifth Mission (May 26, 1945), our plane was caught in the searchlights, which means the Japs were shooting at us alone. We were also attacked by an Ohka bomb (suicide flying torpedo), it was on our tail over Tokyo Bay; it could go 500 MPH but couldn't turn. Our A/C put our B-29 in a dive (I'm guessing we were going 400 MPH) and then pulled out over the water. The Ohka landed in the ocean. Kurtz also notes: 2 engine was covered in oil on the way back, and we sweated "out of gas" for the last half hour, but we had better than 500 gallons when we landed. The target of 2 nights before, the railroad center, was still burning when we went over after our new MPI.

On 1 June 1945 we were flying K-56; this was our sixth mission. After bombs away, we lost #4 engine, then #3 engine started to act up, so we headed straight for Iwo. The plane traffic was thick around Iwo this day; the tower told all planes to keep circling ...another 330th crew, flying on K-37, was bailing. At this point, K-56 lost #3 engine and A/C Smith decided to land at the fighter strip near Mt. Suribachi. Approaching the strip with flaps and wheels down, a B-29 landing directly ahead of them did not immediately exit the strip. In order to avoid a crash, Smith pulled up the wheels and flaps and Lee Ashby (P), applied full emergency power to the remaining engines. K-56 just barely cleared a small hill with tents. As K-56 gained altitude, Smith gave the ditching order since he did not believe he could bring the B-29 around for another landing attempt. Richard Kurtz (CFC) came up front. We planned to exit through the astrodome, I pulled on the plastic strip around the astrodome but could not get it off, so I shot the dome twice and hit it with a board; it finally shattered. Kurtz barricaded the hatch and waited to hit; I braced myself against the turret. Meanwhile, Smith and Ashby were able to trim the plane and bring it around, but Kurtz and I weren't aware of that. At this point the radio went dead so I shot off some flares to indicate our dire straits. I also decided to take off my earphones, so as to prevent them from strangling me. A P-51 fighter assisted us by warding off B-29s that might get in their landing pattern. K-56 came down and, to assure that it would clear the end of the runway to the left, Smith let the plane run fast. Exiting to the left, Smith noticed a jeep running after two life rafts on the runway. Kurtz and I, experiencing the landing bump, released the life rafts since the ditching order was not rescinded; we didn't know we were on land! Kurtz, exiting the astrodome, stated, "Hell, we are on land". As the crew exited the plane, they were met by a Colonel who asked for the A/C. The Colonel told Smith, "You did a great job, but you sure scared the hell out of my men. I never saw them move so fast". Smith attributed their successful two-engine go around and landing to a fine aircraft and the training and dedication of the crew. We returned to Guam in a C-47.

Kurtz – Seventh Mission – June 7, 1945 – K-67:

Back to Osake we went, in another daylight fire raid. Came back slowly as we were low on gas and landed at Saipan after dark. Got out of the plane and everyone fell asleep right there on the cement hardstand while waiting to be taken to the transient area. Stayed on Saipan overnight and came home in the morning, feathered #1 on the way but made it OK.

Kurtz – Eighth Mission – June 10, 1945 – K-51:

We were flying no. 3 position until Keohane's radar went bad in the lead ship. Then we jumped over to deputy lead. Just before turning on the bomb run, we spotted about 15 fighters flying on our right. Everyone thought it was our escort until they started coming in on us from the nose just as we turned onto the bomb run.

Kurtz – Ninth Mission – June 15, 1945 – K-11:

This raid, the first anniversary of the first B-29 strike, was a daylight fire raid on the city of Osake, second largest in the empire. We got up off the coast and couldn't find our formation in the pea soup that covered the empire. Finally decided to make the run in alone (everyone else was eventually forced to do the same, as it was impossible to see beyond your own wing tips).

Kurtz – Tenth Mission – June 18, 1945 – K-67:

We hit the city of Kagashima on the southern tip of Kyushu. This was the only target where we actually saw where our personal bombs landed. Chuck laid them in a dark spot where no fires had yet started and we could look back and see them after they hit.

Kurtz – Eleventh Mission – June 22, 1945 – K-51:

This was a precision daylight raid on the Mitsubishi aircraft plant at Tamashima on the main island of Honshu. Took off early in the morning through a terrific rain; we got soaked loading the turrets and it wasn't comfortable. A 458th ship aborted after take-off and crashed while attempting a 3 engine go-around; all were killed but the tail gunner. Went in on the target flying "Purple Heart Corner" with a conglomerate squadron.

Kurtz – Twelfth Mission – June 26, 1945 – K-51:

Nobeoka was our target. Had 40 bombs but one wouldn't drop until the doors were closed. Then it smashed through the doors to the accompaniment of Landis' screams.

Kurtz – Thirteenth Mission – July 2, 1945 – K-67:

600 Superforts, the largest number to hit Japan in one day, were out on this night.

Kurtz – Fourteenth Mission – July 7, 1945 – K-51:

600 more 29's were out on this night, hitting 5 different cities in fire raids. We went to Kofu, in the mountains – 70 miles west of Tokyo.

Kurtz – Fifteenth Mission – July 10, 1945 – K-55:

We headed for Gifu in the mountains west of Nagoya. We carried one passenger, a radar countermeasure man. We got caught in two thermals over the target, each of which kicked us up about 500 feet.

Kurtz – OKINAWA FLIGHT – July 15, 1945 – K-31:

This was a fighter escort mission to Okinawa. Took off at 7:00 AM in K-31 with K-8 to help us escort 20 fighters (P-47s). All the fighters joined us over Guam and we headed for Oki. The fighters amused us all by coming in close and then going out to pull their acrobatics. When we hit bad weather they all packed in close under our wings.

Kurtz – Sixteenth Mission – July 20, 1945 – K-31:

On the 19th, we moved up to Iwo to fly dumbbo missions. They got us up at 3 in the morning to go up off of Chose Point to search for a couple of crews in the 313th Wing lost over this target.

Kurtz – Seventeenth Mission – July 25, 1945 – K-31:

This was a regular dumbbo mission; we went to circle the sub just south of Chose Point. We had no trouble picking up the sub on the radar scope and we circled it for better than an hour in dark.

Kurtz – Eighteenth Mission – August 7, 1945 – K-8:

Back on Guam now and this time we flew super dumbbo for a mission flown by the 29th Bomb Group. Their target was the Toyahashi aircraft plant just south of Nagoya. We orbited the sub right off Hammamatsu (altitude 1,000 feet). Heard about the Atom Bomb on the way home.

Kurtz – Nineteenth Mission – August 10, 1945 – K-8:

This was our last dumbbo mission and we flew with the 30th group as they headed for target 356 in Tokyo. We orbited just outside of Tokyo Bay.

Kurtz – Twentieth Mission – August 15, 1945 – K-51:

We made a maximum effort raid on Japan to knock them out of the war. Better than 800 planes went over their respective targets. As we walked into the briefing room, we heard about the end of the war!

The war had ended, however it was not quite over for us. We flew the "Show of Force" over the BB-63 USS Missouri as the surrender papers were being signed. Looking down we could see the ship covered with sailors all in white uniforms. This was when MacArthur was running the show; it was very impressive. Then one more flight. General LeMay wanted to demonstrate the power of the B-29. This was his idea of the Strategic Air Command (SAC). Three B-29s were to fly nonstop from Japan to Washington D.C. Two other B-29s were to fly with them as backup or Super Dumbo. This was in case one of the three went down on the flight. We were picked as one of the escort planes. We flew along with them, however, we had to land at Shemya, one of the Aleutian Islands. This island was a B-24 base and they had never seen a B-29. Everyone came out to greet us. From there we flew on to

Anchorage Alaska. We were hoping that we would continue on to the U.S. Unfortunately, we had to fly back to Guam. We loaded the bomb bay with frozen containers of milk and distributed them when we got back to Guam.

I would sum up my war experience as "a few seconds of sheer terror; otherwise it was fun when it was fun."

When we flew home, we took 15-20 people with us; the flight from Hawaii to Mather Field was traumatic ... when we landed everyone disappeared – just like that! I caught a train to Chicago and then on to NY (Manhattan) and I was discharged in upstate NY. I lived in an apartment and went back to school to study Biology. I worked in the lab for a cosmetic company, also as a salesman for the fur market in NY; I met my sweetheart Ruth during this time, after three months we were engaged. I worked at AYERST Labs for 17 years, and was vice-president at OHM Laboratories (another pharmaceutical company). Ruth and I have been married 61 years and have two children and two grandchildren – all living nearby.



B-29 Radio Equipment

The technical advances of the ART-13 were due to the an elegant marriage of superior electronic design coupled with precision advances in mechanical and electromechanical innovations. Specifically:

- The Collins Autotune, an electromechanical shaft positioning control device capable of precisely locating ten preset-able angular positions with the flick of a rotary switch; and,
- The Collins Permeability Tuned Oscillator (PTO), a radio tuning device that brought stability, precision and linearity to a new standard.

The sensational ART-13 was picked up by the Army Air Corps, and found its way into virtually every B-29 Bomber. Matched with the venerable BC-348 receiver, the pair was used as the "liaison" (or long distance) radio set. The HF transmitter used in earlier bombers was the BC-375, a much taller unit requiring

a cumbersome manual operation for frequency changes. B-29 radio men were typically trained on the BC-375 and never saw an ART-13 until they stepped aboard their first B-29. (B-29 Radio Project ART-13, retrieved July 5, 2012 from <http://www.w0cxx.us/b-29/radio.html>)

Harvey Landis further notes: With the older BC-375 we had to deal with changing the additional tuning coils. It was a pain; we were trained that way so we thought it was normal. With the B-29 we had the new Collins transmitter that was a dream to use. It was smaller and much easier to use. It had good range and we had a choice of using the fixed antenna, or the trailing antenna. They always worked. However in combat we were ordered not to use them except for emergency as the enemy would know that we were coming.

