

July 19, 2010, F.A.H.P News

A Tale of Long Ago (1945): In the current issue of *PRESERVATION*, the magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, there appeared a photo that jumped out at me. Under the title “Pagat, on the northern coast of Guam”, the flat ridge in the background, nearly 600 feet above the sea, was obviously the location of World War II’s North Field. Here B-29s, with their full load of bombs, took off for targets in Japan, 1600 statute miles away. Two parallel runways, 6,000 feet in length, ended just where the cliff dropped off to the Pacific below. These airplanes, loaded to 138,000 pounds (Boeing planned them for a maximum weight of 120,000) barely became airborne when they reached the cliff, then they would drop some 300 feet over the water to gain airspeed, and finally climb several miles out to their normal altitude. A similar airfield, called Northwest Field, was on a peninsula to the west. Saipan and Tinian, about 100 miles to the north, also were home to several squadrons of B-29s.

The purpose of the current article was to point out the location of an ancient village of the *Chamorro*, the indigenous people of present-day Guam, recently discovered with its 50-plus mounds containing evidence of day-to-day life, and some 20 sets of limestone pillars that once supported dwellings of wood and thatch. These are in a small tropical jungle below the North Field cliff, and their existence is threatened by the U.S. military, if present-day major operations are transferred from Okinawa to Guam.

The “News” of December 24, 2007, told of my experiences on North Field during the Christmas period of 1945. The war having ended more than 3 months before, the bomber squadrons had abandoned the west side of the field, and the jungle had fast encroached, with weeds growing through the floor of the former officers’ club. Several of us (just two at first) were sent up there from our Weather Squadron headquarters on Harmon Field, 10 miles away, to “stabilize” the area for the ill-fated and most impractical relocation of our squadron to more spacious quarters. Our time there was not all bad, however. We were, for the most part, away from the “brass” and could do as we pleased. Three or four of us decided to build a deLuxe tropical cottage on the highest point of the cliff with a splendid view across the ocean to Rota, a small island half-way between Guam and Tinian. For two or three days, we cut down the jungle in a space about 50 feet square, and laid out our plans for the structure, which would be built with scrap lumber, of which there was plenty from the abandoned barracks. Nothing more happened, but I could see exactly where this was on the current photo in *Preservation*.

For relaxation, we would descend the cliff, the steepest part by hanging onto a rope tied to a tree at the top, walk across 100 yards of poison-free weeds at the bottom, come out on the beach, and have a swim. The only residents of this low-lying area were abandoned Japanese who would hide during the day and come out at night to seek food from the U.S. military’s garbage areas behind the few kitchens still functioning on the east side of North Field. We never saw them, and we surmised that they didn’t know the war was over. They were hiding out and we went swimming almost exactly where the ancient village existed. Little did we know!

Last week was rather quiet at Auburn Heights with many members still on tour, but work on several projects continued. Art Wallace worked on the fenders and Ted Kamen sanded the frame, making progress with the 607 restorations. Emil Christofano and Jeff Pollock continued

work on the rear axle bearings of the Rauch & Lang, and Tom repaired steam fittings on the boiler in the 71. On Thursday night about 30 members enjoyed a tour of the Marshall Brothers Paper Mill on Bengé Rd., courtesy of Dan Citron. Dan provided the group with a brief history of the paper making operation that ended in 2008 and a walking tour of the entire property, as well as ideas / plans for developing the site and surrounding grounds as a museum. The mill remains much as it was on the final day of production, providing a glimpse into its 100 plus years of history.

Tours, Tours, Tours--Mansion, Museum, Mill & Maine

We hosted reserved tours of the mansion and museum last week (with another slated for Wed, July 21) and have several more scheduled this summer so the word is spreading about the hidden treasures of Auburn Heights. Dan Citron also conducted his first tour of the old Marshall Brothers Paper Mill last Thursday, with 29 members taking advantage of this sneak peak inside the old building. As other opportunities to get an insider's look at the NVF property arise, we will be sure to alert FAHP members. Finally, our Steam Team has returned from Maine, where they reportedly had an exhausting but exciting time. Watch for an article in the next Herald on their exploits!

Final Ice Cream Run, July 22

We'll be making our last ice cream run of the season on Thursday. If you wish to attend, please notify Susan (srandolph@auburnheights.org) or Steve (sbryce@auburnheights.org) asap to ensure we have a seat saved especially for you. There's no better way to cool off from the summer heat than with a steam car ride through the countryside and Woodside Farm ice cream! The Auburn Heights caravan will leave at 6:30 pm.

Sign Up Now to Volunteer at the Next Steamin' Day (Aug 1)

The next Steamin' Day is right around the corner, and we need volunteers to make it a success! Please e-mail Richard Bernard (rnbernardjr@hotmail.com) if you can help. ALL roles needed!

Strasburg Rail Road Run Saturday, July 24

Anyone who wants to drive or ride in a Stanley car next Saturday, July 24 to Strasburg Rail Road should plan to start firing up at 8:00 am. We want to get away from Auburn Heights by 9:00 for the trip. Lou Mandich has a contingent of cars going from his garage in Unionville, leaving there at 9:00 am. Our route will be north on Route 82 to the junction of Strasburg Road just north of Ercildoun, then Strasburg Road through Parkesburg and Gap west to Strasburg. This road carries the Route 741 route designation west of Gap. Please let Tom Marshall know if you plan to go.