

JULY 20, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

OKINAWA, Fall, 1945: Had it not been for the devastation of the Okinawan cities of Naha and Shuri and the surrounding countryside, Okinawa would have been a beautiful island in the fall of 1945. These cities took the worst of the June bombings and naval attacks that year, in the last major campaign of World War II. A Japanese island before the war, Okinawa was only 325 miles from Japan's southwest island of Kyushu where the second atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, and was considered strategic for the invasion of Japan. Okinawa was secured by U.S. forces in late June.

Our Weather Reconnaissance Crew of ten men flew from Guam to Okinawa with one of our B-24 weather planes on September 28. Our squadron, headquartered on Guam, had a Flight of four crews and supporting personnel on Okinawa, flying weather missions out of YonTan Airfield. Most missions were 12 hours in length, flying in daylight when possible, north and west from Okinawa, some going over the Great Wall of China.

As life in the western Pacific went, we had a good time on Okinawa. We lived in tents with wooden floors, had a screened-in shower room, and independence from the "brass" on Guam. Okinawa was hilly, almost mountainous. When viewing a movie at an open-air theatre, the hills around, with a few flickering lights, reminded some of the Hollywood Hills. During and after the battle, the native population had been moved to the northern 1/3 of the island, which was largely untouched by the war. Military personnel occupied the middle third where airfields and seaports were being built, and the southern third with its former native villages had been abandoned. In retrospect, it makes little sense that we were even there flying weather reconnaissance, and that airfields were still being built, with the war over and the invasion of Japan no longer necessary.

One Sunday, our crew signed out a 6 x 6 army truck, and went south to visit some of the vacated native villages. Very little damage had been done to some of them, and we could walk in the houses where most personal belongings had been left behind. We found interesting pottery, cookware, and sometimes personal garments. It was an eerie feeling, however, to explore this way with no one for miles around. We felt sad for those who had been vacated.

Four members of our squadron, led by my friend Dick Estabrook (who could fix anything), built a 4-man hotel on the edge of our flight headquarters, in which they intended to live the life of luxury. They had a shower that collected rain water, and an enclosed living area. Early October on Okinawa was cool, not like Guam in the tropics, and outdoor showers were only comfortable in the warmest period of the afternoon. Native women, with whom we could not converse because of the language barrier, would come into our area to pick up and deliver laundry, and they would snicker as they walked past our showers, where they could see all.

I contracted asthma from the heavy dust that swept across our living area, caused by the gravel road below and the many trucks building the airfields. I was grounded and sent back to Guam on October 15 for further examination. Improving rapidly, I was assigned to future duty on Guam, holding only manufactured jobs from that time on. It seemed forever until I finally left

Guam on June 24, 1946, for the LONG trip back to the U.S.A., where I arrived in San Francisco on August 6, after nearly 3 weeks on Saipan and 26 days on the *S.S. President Buchanan*.

On Tuesday evening, July 21 (TOMORROW) we are planning an Ice Cream Run to Mitchells' Creamery at Woodside Farm. Expected to go at this time are about 5 cars and 10 people. Suggested cars are the Stanley Models CX (Schwoebel), 87, 76, 78 (Bernard), Mountain Wagon, 725 and 735. Ample seats should be available to all members who wish to go. For those planning to drive, start-up time should be about 5 P.M., with departure from Auburn Heights by 6:00. Depending on the time of departure, a longer or shorter route can be taken. The return trip should leave Mitchells' by 7:30 P.M. and come directly back. For driving students hoping to progress, operators are asked to let these candidates drive to become more familiar with how a Stanley operates and handles. For those who don't go or who have time after the Run, a list of projects will be available for a work session.

On Saturday, July 25, Lou Mandich is planning a run with several old cars to the Strasburg R.R., and several from our group have expressed interest in going. It will be a special day there with free train rides for those coming in antique cars (two per car) and several photo opportunities with the trains. Lou plans to leave his Unionville Last Chance Garage at 8:30 A.M., but we can go later if it's hard to be there that early. On Sunday, July 26, from 1:00 to 4:00 P.M., there will be a railroad training session on the Auburn Valley.

Next Tuesday, July 28, volunteers will be needed most of the day for the visit of "Rails Ahead". This is filming and interviews by a TV company, an in-depth look at Auburn Heights and what we offer here. From 9 A.M. until about noon, their people will be conducting interviews with several of us, asking questions about volunteerism, steam technology, preservation, etc. In the afternoon, they want to see at least one train run with lots of activity, so we'll try to assemble a number of people of all ages. They realize our emphasis may be more on cars, so they will feature the Stanleys as well, and we'll demonstrate the operation of at least one car. Catherine is lining up volunteers to help that day. I believe the final product will be shown on public TV.

We have made good progress on the minor repairs the cars needed that were at Saratoga. The 76 is back in business with the water tank repaired and the feed water heater tested and proved to be tight. The problem was found in the rear of the Model EX, and this is partially repaired. The boiler on the Model K may have some life left, as only a few tubes were leaking in the bottom head, making it worth-while to try to get them tight without removing the boiler from the car. The burner needs to be cleaned up, the tubes swaged, and the boiler tested again. The 725 needs a good clean-up.

Auburn Valley R.R. projects are progressing. Art Sybell, Art Wallace, and Richard Bernard have been painting a new R.R. car (I should have given credit last week to Art Sybell for helping Jonathan Rickerman build new seats for this car, as it was done in Art's shop). The Diesel locomotive is nearing its first testing on the Auburn Valley. The long-delayed signal project has been put in the hands of Butch Cannard, and he has plans to move ahead on this.

Tom