

MAY 17, 2010 F.A.H.P. NEWS

The Pacific was “Our Ocean”. In the last months of World War II, the United States “owned” the Pacific Ocean, but it had not been that way in the early days of the war with Japan. In the six months after the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese moved rapidly, capturing the American possessions of Wake Island, Guam, and the Philippines and pushing up the Aleutians toward Alaska. Occupying half of China, they soon captured the Malay Peninsula and Singapore. Many islands south of the Equator were in Japanese hands in the push to conquer Australia.

A stunned United States mobilized quickly and had to defend and launch attacks on two fronts, the European and Pacific theaters. The Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway in the summer of 1942 gave the U.S. hope that the enemy could be repelled. U.S. Marines fought hard on islands like Guadalcanal and Bougainville as the slow advance northward caused Japanese-held islands to fall to the Allies. After numerous naval victories and island campaigns, the U.S. captured Saipan and Tinian and took back Guam in the summer of 1944, and MacArthur landed in the Philippines for a campaign that eventually re-captured Manila. In the fall of 1944, B-29’s began bombing Japan’s main islands from new airfields in the Marianas (it was 1600 statute miles from Guam to Tokyo Bay- Iwo Jima, half-way between, was captured at the end of February, 1945).

I went to the Pacific theater in June, 1945. Except for the final land campaign to take Okinawa, only 325 miles from Japan’s home islands, the United States controled the ocean by that time. Our crew of 10 flew one of three brand new B-24 weather planes from Hunter Field near Savannah, GA, to Guam to join the 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, a part of the 20th Air Force. We flew on daily orders, and it took about 10 days of mostly-daytime flying. We stopped overnight at Kirtland Field, Albuquerque, and then at Mather Field near Sacramento. After four or five days at Mather, the plane went on to Hickam Field, Honolulu, with a lightened load of five crew members, as this was a 13-hour over-water flight. I was one of five non-essential crew members, and we had a more complicated way of reaching Hawaii and the new B-24. We were bused to Hamilton Field in Marin County near San Francisco, then after three days or so flew out of Fairfield-Suisan Air Field in the middle of the night on a C-87, which was a B-24 converted for carrying uncomfortable passengers. 13 hours later, we, too, were at Hickam Field, but no reunion took place. The other five and the new airplane were waiting for us at Barking Sands Army Air Field, an overseas replacement center on the west coast of the island of Kauai. We were flown there in a C-47 and the reunion was complete. The living conditions at Barking Sands were the worst I experienced in the Pacific. We stayed there 3 or 4 days, when our orders finally came to proceed westward.

There were two overnight stops between Kauai and Guam. It was four hours to Johnson Island, eight more hours to Kwajalein, and eight more to Harmon Field on Guam. From my observation location in the lower nose of the B-24, I marveled at two things: the huge ocean below, quiet as a mill pond (pacific, indeed!) with its cumulous clouds everywhere, AND the thousands of ships of all kinds plying the water below. These were American ships, many of them “Victory” ships, carrying war materials and supplies for the invasion of Japan. Looking below, it was anything but a lonely sight; there was no question, it was OUR ocean.

Those working on the Museum upgrading, headed by Dan Citron, Susan Randolph, Jerry Novak, Steve Bryce, and Dale Simpkins, had help from most of the volunteers at our work sessions last week, and by Saturday, when we had our first “charter” event of the year, the cars were cleaned and back in position, and the new construction basically completed and several exhibits moved. About eight volunteers were here on Saturday, and all went well. Locomotive 402, with its new pistons, pulled the train effortlessly, and at the end of the afternoon it was cut off so Jim Sank’s “Diesel” could be hooked on and tested with a full load of passengers. It, too, pulled our loaded train, and with minor modifications, should serve our needs very well. Art Sybell had “Little Toot” patch-painted so it looked 100%, and Ron Turochy improved electrical contacts on our electric train layout. MANY THANKS to all who helped prepare and were here on Saturday for the special affair. The Events Committee met last Tuesday evening, evaluated our recent events, and refined the schedule for the rest of the year. Anne Cleary needs to know who would like to participate in Kennett Square’s Memorial Day parade on May 31, and which cars they would like to take.

Yesterday, four Stanleys made the 35-mile round-trip to Linvilla Orchards to attend the Spring Car Show of the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania. Ten volunteers went with the cars, talked up FAHP at the show, and enjoyed the beautiful spring day. Our 1908 Model K was the oldest car there, and the 1910 Model 71 was tied with Dave Leon’s 1910 Reo for the second-oldest. At 2 P.M., Bill Schwoebel, on his 58th birthday, gave a firing-up demonstration with the K, which was very well attended.

Jonathan Rickerman, chairman of the Publicity Committee, has organized volunteers, promotional flyers, and locations for placement, to promote our Steamin’ Sundays, notably the first one on Sunday, June 6. Tim Ward, Art Sybell, Art Wallace, and several others are helping with this effort. Please let Jonathan or Susan know if you can help with these distributions. Now we need to concentrate on promotional and directional signs of several kinds. Please furnish us with some “Burma Shave” type ditties as requested last week.

Tomorrow night, May 18, Bill Schwoebel has called a meeting of the Auburn Valley Railroad Committee at 7:00 P.M. in the FAHP office. Please try to attend.

The quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors will take place on Thursday, May 20, in the F.A.H.P. office at 7:00 P.M. We know Bob Reilly, Mike May, and Dee Durham have regretted (Bob expects to be on Conference call). We hope all others will be able to attend.

Tom