

August 11, 2014 Story for Weekly News

This Time in 1945 — Exciting Days: Since the fall of 1944, the main islands of Japan had been pounded continuously by Super-Fortress B-29s, weighing up to 138,000 pounds (Boeing had set a maximum of 120,000) as they took off from their 6,000-foot airstrips on Guam, Tinian, and Saipan, nearly 1,600 miles away. The tiny coral island of Iwo Jima, secured in late February 1945, was midway between and served as an emergency landing place for disabled aircraft. Fighter squadrons, consisting mostly of P-51s, were also based on Iwo Jima. Following the end of the European war in May, Jimmy Doolittle's 8th Air Force had been transferred to the Pacific to join Curtis LeMay's 20th Air Force, to which the B-29s were assigned from the time they arrived the previous year. The costly Okinawa campaign, capturing a key Japanese stronghold only 325 miles from the Japanese mainland, concluded in late June 1945. Plans for the invasion of Japan were moving ahead at a rapid pace. At the same time, B-29 bomb crews returning from their Japanese missions in late July told us all the cities were burned out, and there was no way the war could last much longer.

Our B-24 weather reconnaissance squadron flew four 12-hour missions from Guam daily, and by August, we had an additional four crews on Iwo Jima and the same number on Okinawa. I was still at Guam, and on August 6, we flew our 12 hours south and east over Tarawa and the Marshall Islands. In mid-afternoon on our way back to Guam, a faint message was heard on our radio that some new type of bomb had been dropped on Japan, different from anything we had known. Shortly after the arrival back at our home base, we learned that the Enola Gay (a B-29) had taken off from Tinian before daybreak that morning and dropped the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The days between August 6 and the final signing of the surrender on the Battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay on September 2 were tense ones indeed, but also exciting because of the prospect that the six-year World War II was over.

Nothing came from the besieged Japanese immediately after Hiroshima. Three days later, another B-29 (I think it was called "Boxcar") dropped a second such bomb on the Naval Base at Nagasaki. It would not be long before peace overtures came from top Japanese leaders. It was August 15 in the Far East (August 14 in the U.S.) when the announcement finally came: the Japanese would agree to a complete surrender, with one request: that Hirohito would remain as their Emperor. Jubilation broke out in U.S. cities and in many other places in the world. Girls in the nude jumped in the fountain at Union Square in San Francisco.

As described in the "News" of August 6, 2007, our crew went to Iwo Jima on August 28 and flew over Tokyo Bay and the Battleship Missouri on September 3, the day after General MacArthur accepted the surrender. Although we were not supposed to be there, we also flew over Hiroshima that day, but a heavy cloud cover prevented us from seeing much. In mid-October, on Army orders promoting me to First Lieutenant, a major (unknown to me) and his B-29 crew received the Distinguished Flying Cross for flying the last bombing mission of the War on August 15. Historic days, indeed.

Work Report: On Tuesday, August 5, the following fourteen volunteers were on hand: Jerry Novak (in charge), Bill Schwoebel, Dave Leon, Gary Green, Steve Bryce, Jerry Lucas, Ted Kamen, Devon Hall, Mark Russell, Ken Ricketts, Mike Ciosek, Richard Bernard, Edwin Paschall, and Dennis Dragon.

Locomotive 401 was cleaned from its August 3 operation, and the valve setting was tested on compressed air. Adjustments to the right valve brought it into time, and those involved believe a great improvement was made. The Rauch & Lang electric was moved to the museum and the chargers hooked to its batteries. Several Stanley parts upstairs in the museum were identified and photographed. A few will be put in the auction at the Stanley Museum Sept. 12-13.

The points were filed and the coils tested on our Model T Ford, the car was cleaned, and the top put down. More sorting of parts was accomplished prior to settling on specific locations in our parts bins. The Mountain Wagon was vacuumed out and cleaned from its use on 8/3. The front wheels on the Stanley Model K were found to be considerably out of balance, and 9 oz. will be required on the right wheel and 10 oz. on the left wheel. Special weights will be fabricated.

On Thursday, August 7, 10 volunteers were on hand, viz: Bill Schwoebel (in charge), Steve Bryce, Jared Schoenly, Jerry Koss, Dave Leon, Ted Kamen, Bob Stransky, Gerhard Maute, Eugene Maute, and Tom Marshall.

More parts were sorted and separated for the parts bins. The Model 607, having siphoned after the firing-up demonstration on 8/3, continued to siphon and overflow onto the museum floor. Logic says this can happen only if the boiler siphoned COMPLETELY full, then the by-pass valve is opened and the boiler water siphons through the throttle and out the drip valve. With the boiler completely full, this siphoning continues until the water tank is drained. The water was cleaned up and the car set back in place. Up-to-date insurance cards were found missing in many of our cars. This was remedied on 8/8.

The Model 725 was made ready for its trip to the Summerfest at the Wilmington & Western Railroad on Saturday. (The Models 76 and K were “prepped” on August 8.) Brass was polished on the Model T Ford and the Model K. The popcorn machine was thoroughly cleaned following its 8/3 operation. The Operating Review Board had a short meeting.

On Saturday, August 9, three steamers and the 1937 Packard made successful round-trips to the Summerfest event at the Wilmington & Western Railroad’s Greenbank Station. The Stanley Models K, 76, and 725 were joined by the ’37 Packard, and Jerry Novak, Rich Gregg, Steve Bryce, Dave Leon, Robert Hopkins, and Tom Marshall took part.