

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 20, 2009

**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 10 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 theater, 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 four-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 three weeks on Saipan and 26 days on the *S.S. President Buchanan*.