

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 9, 2013

After the War Was Over (Part I): If ever a part of my life was wasted, it was from September 1945, when General MacArthur accepted the Japanese surrender, until August 1946, when I finally got home and was separated from the service. Except when on Iwo Jima for several days at the time of the surrender, and about a month later on Okinawa for three weeks, most of the time was spent on Guam, where our 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron was based. The problem in getting men home was logistical: there were not enough ships and airplanes to bring nearly three million men home in a rapid fashion. First, there was the “points” system, based on length of service and the number of battle ribbons a candidate had. I had 48 points; in September 1945, many had over 100. As men came home, the number of required points dropped, and by mid-winter it was down to about 50. I thought I was next in line, and then the points system was abandoned.

In the final months of our Weather Squadron (October '45 to January '46), jobs were invented to keep us weather observers occupied. I was grounded, anyway, due to an asthma condition that surfaced on Okinawa in October. For a while I was an assistant mess officer. For a while I was sent to North Field on Guam to establish a new headquarters for our squadron (a pipe dream of Colonel Chevasse). I had to close out a PX at this remote North Field location, fast being taken over by the jungle. Finally, when the squadron was a thing of the past, I was assigned, along with several other former “55th” officers, to 20th Air Force Headquarters on Harmon Field, the center of all Air Force operations in the Marianas. I was a weather forecaster on Harmon Field for a while, something I hadn't done since leaving New Mexico a year earlier. Since there were too many forecasters, that job didn't last long, but I happened to be on duty the day General Eisenhower, then Chief of Staff of the Army, arrived in a C-54 to spend a brief time with the island commander.

There was ample time to play basketball and pool at the Officers' Club, and sometimes my friends and I could obtain a jeep to explore the native sections of Guam, for which we could get a special daytime pass. Guam was about 22 miles long (north to south) and from 4 to 8 miles wide, and the military, including the Navy, had occupied the northern 2/3 of the island. The native towns on the south third were little disturbed by the War, and the highest point of 1,300 feet was in this south portion. The road was dusty but good, and the speed limit on the island was 20 m.p.h. We made the trip several times and got to know some of the natives. Mrs. Lojan ran a village store in the town of Inarajan, which also had a large Catholic Church. She sold mostly canned goods and sodas.

It was easier to acquisition a 6 x 6 truck than it was a jeep, so this often provided transportation around the island with free gasoline. All during this time, however, I was angling for a reason to be sent home. I wrote to both of Delaware's U.S. Senators explaining the situation. Senator James M. Tunnell of Georgetown replied that he would see what he could do. Senator C. Douglass Buck was not so encouraging.

Finally, in early June, an officer named Major Hales, the top weather man on Guam, found a way to get rid of Dick Estabrook, Jim Lombard, and myself, who had been thorns in his side for some time. We got orders to report to the Base Commander on Kwajalein for “temporary” duty. The “temporary” was to replace the weather forecasters there, so the regulars, more familiar with Kwajalein weather, could participate in the upcoming Bikini Atoll Atomic Bomb tests. None of us wanted to go, as “Kwaj” was a terrible place to be stationed – just a coral atoll not much larger than its landing strip, and I feared duty here would delay my return to the States. Lying awake thinking how I could get out of going, I had a brainstorm. When I was sent back to Guam from Okinawa with asthma eight months before, my orders read “reassigned to duty on Guam.” The next morning I went to the Base Physician, with whom I had played pool at the officers' club. He fixed me up, and the order was rescinded. Hales was furious, but he couldn't do anything about it. *To be continued next week.*