

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 11, 2014

**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 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force had been transferred to the Pacific to join Curtis LeMay's 20<sup>th</sup> 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 *Weekly 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.