

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 15, 2011

**This Time of the Year:** The first full week in August was traditionally the time of the big trapshooting tournament at Yorklyn, but occasionally it was the second week, depending upon the moon cycle. My father never wanted to have night shooting during a full moon, as the night should be dark for the flood lights to properly illuminate the clay targets. Toward the end of the month were the annual "dog days," a period of dull days with high humidity that made many yearn for the end of summer. Bad things like summer infections were supposed to be more numerous during dog days, and children were often warned not to swim in creeks with their low stream flow at this time of year. Dog days, like Indian summers and white Christmases, did not always happen as forecast or desired.

The year 1945, the year I was 21, was a very meaningful year, not because I was 21 but because it signaled the end of World War II. It is easy to think back to many of these important August events that surrounded a young Army Air Force lieutenant. The first atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, and the second on Nagasaki on August 9 (one day earlier in the Continental U.S.). On August 15, Tokyo time (August 14 in the U.S.), the Japanese announced they would accept unconditional surrender, and pandemonium broke out wherever Americans could celebrate. Naked women jumped into the public fountain in San Francisco's Union Square, and similar escapades took place in New York and across America. To a lesser extent, Europe celebrated as well, but its big time had come three months earlier with V-E Day on May 8.

I was flying B-24 weather reconnaissance missions out of Guam, only 100 miles from Tinian, where the Enola Gay had taken off with its atomic bomb on August 6, but that day our flight plan called for us to go southeast, so we were in the opposite direction. As we made our turn near Truk in the Carolines to head back toward Guam, a message came over the plane's radio that a new type of bomb, more powerful than anything then known, had been dropped on Japan. When we landed about 6 p.m., which was standard practice, we learned more, but first fragments of information were scarce and often incorrect. Having been at M.I.T. 18 months before, where the Manhattan Project was in full progress, August 6, 1945, was the first time I or anyone not involved in the project knew anything about it.

Three or four crews from our 55<sup>th</sup> Weather Reconnaissance Squadron were stationed temporarily on Iwo Jima, and we flew there from Guam, a four-hour flight, on August 28. We were supposed to fly a weather-gathering mission over Japan the next day. At the last minute, it was canceled and rescheduled for August 30. On August 30 and 31 and September 1 and 2, the orders were the same: our flight was canceled at the last minute each day. Late on September 2, we learned why. The Tokyo area was off-limits as secret arrangements had been planned for the official surrender to take place on the Battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay, where Generals MacArthur and Wainwright obtained the signatures of the Japanese high command. Late on September 2, General Wainwright's plane re-fueled at Iwo Jima, as he was being flown home after nearly four years in Japanese prisons. Some of my close friends got a glimpse of the gaunt general. On September 3, we finally went to Japan, and we made it into a sightseeing trip more than a weather-gathering mission, flying low over Tokyo right up to the front of the Imperial Palace and finally to Hiroshima, where the cloud cover prevented us from seeing the devastation. We had been in the air 14 hours when we landed at Iwo well after dark. None of my other military experiences quite equaled this day.