

A Unique Look Back at The Wars End

Editor's Note: During the St. Louis Reunion last year an envelope was dropped off at the Registration Desk by a Mr. Sack Smith of St. Louis, MO. It contained the following letter was written by one of the aircraft's crew members, last name believed to be Bowles, likely the Flight Engineer on the General's aircraft. The General referred to in the letter was General Joseph W. Stilwell, Commander of the 10th U. S. Army in Okinawa when the war ended. The General Merrill referred to was Major General Frank D. Merrill, of Merrill's Marauders in Burma, Deputy Commander of the 10th U. S. Army under Stilwell. The S/Sgt. Leo Smith in the letter, now deceased, was the father of Mr. Sack Smith. The letter was written on a manual typewriter over a period of several days. It was apparently completed on September 3, 1945. This letter has been rewritten for the NL but the presentation is much as it was in the original letter. There was no heading on it. It is published with Mr. Smith's approval. It is rather long but we believe you will enjoy it. It is a piece of GI history. We appreciate Mr. Smith's willingness to share it with us.

September 3, 1945
Okinawa Shima, Japan

Following is to make up for days I missed writing. You can see why. In the first place, no place to mail letters. The reason you haven't been receiving mail and the reason that you also haven't received any was because all airplanes, boats etc. were standing by to carry troops to Japan for the occasion and to the Official Surrender. I received one letter from you August 22nd, and was surprised to find out that you weren't receiving any mail. I want to make this letter interesting if possible, therefore I have to think as I write, but there is a guy visiting us asking questions etc, and is very aggravating therefore if I get nervous I will finish this tomorrow. And I am getting nervous by the minute. There is no need to look for me to walk in on you soon because I will probably be here quite awhile. I also am sorry. I did not see Tommy. I went to the movies tonight and saw "The Big Sleep", Lawrence Becall and Humphrey Bogart. It was very good picture. The guy is still here I guess I am jittery from exhaustion. Well, getting down to the letter I will start with August 30th.

I have already written on that date, but it all goes into this trip. So in the morning we got news that we were going to Tokyo. MacArthur was here on Okinawa, he is a short man not much larger than General Stilwell. In his pictures he appears to be a six-footer. Well on this date, we got cots, coffee, fruit juices, "E" rations, bedding etc. for the crew (4). Carried about 20 gallons of water because we did not know what we were running into and have found out through experience that being prepared saves a lot of stomachs and headaches, we loaded all of this on the plane. I ran engines up and checked instruments and engines and airplanes general it was perfect. So we came back to our tent, piddled around with incidentals, cleaned up, picket out clothes we would carry and wear. Do not remember what we did on this night, but next morning August 31.

We got up early, ate, washing, gathered up what we were taking with us and went out to the field. Thiesen and Hunt and Smitty went to briefing with the plans for the trip. I went to the ship and gave it a final check, loaded it and Thiesen and Hunt and Smitty showed up after briefing. Loaded the one machine gun, and 3 rifles plus pistols and waited around for the General. At 10:30 he and Major General Merrill (you remember him, he is the one you met at Washington National Airport) showed up. The crew and passenger list consisted of General Stilwell, Major General Merrill, Major Arnold, Major Thiesen, Captain Higgins who is Aide to General Merrill, Lt. Hunt, S/Sgt. Leo Smith and myself. We were loaded and took to the air at 10:45. The trip was over water most of the time, and we above the clouds at 9,000 feet. Enroute we ate one meal that Major Arnold brought along consisting of Roast Beef, ham, cheese, olives, pickles, potatoe salad, bread, coffee, pears etc. We neared Japan proper, the visibility was about 5 miles with low hanging clouds. We could see the base of mountains, but not the tops due to clouds. We came up Tokyo Bay, saw destroyers in bay with noses pointed to