

15 May, 2003

In May of 1945 we were sent to Guam for repairs to the wiring of Turret II due to the powder explosion and subsequent fire. Several days after our arrival, I went ashore on liberty with LT Jimmie Jones of one of the Machine Gun Divisions (I was a young Ensign in the FC Division in Main Plot). As we were walking around we spotted a Marine sitting on the side of the trail and holding several small Japanese flags — one was the battle flag, another a national flag, and the third commemorated the Japanese victory over the Russians at Tsushima Straits in the early 1900s. Jimmie asked if they were for sale, eventually bought three for \$10., and thought this would be a great souvenir since we rarely had an opportunity to acquire things with which we could return home. We continued along the path and soon came to a large Quonset-type hut on the top of a hill with a small line of people waiting to go inside. Having been in the Navy for some time, we both got in line and followed the crowd. The inside of the building was stuffed to the rafters with shoe boxes that were filled with Japanese flags, and they were free for the taking! Jimmie and I each corded up two stacks of seven or eight boxes for ease in carrying and returned to SoDak. Whether everyone aboard actually took home flags, I cannot verify, but we brought back enough for several flags for each and every officer and man on the ship. Leave it to the Marines!

After the ship returned to the States and then went on to Long Beach, it was announced that several groups could go on 2-3 weeks leave. The problem was that airplanes, trains, and buses, were all filled with returning Anny types who had been accumulating in Hawaii and beyond in anticipation of an invasion which, of course, never happened, but they were now being discharged in droves and had gobbled up all the transportation (on government discharge orders). This was a real heartbreaker for SoDak sailors! I decided to make a try at a different type of solution. I contacted a couple of guys that had been Flying Tigers and had a C-47, and then signed a contract to charter the plane for a trip from LA to D.C., Philadelphia (that's where I wanted to go), and Floyd Bennett in NYC. I then made an announcement on the ship calling for anyone who wanted to go to one of these three stops to see me with about \$125. cash. The money chest was filled quickly, and we all thought we had it made. Several days before the flight, I called the Tigers, only to learn that they had been unable to get a license for the plane from the CAA. I went to my good friend Jack Hill (Main Plot Officer, now deceased) with the sad tale. He called his father who was a Vice Admiral, and who advised us to call his good friend Donald Douglas in LA. Jack & I went to visit Mr. Douglas and made an arrangement much the same as that which I had made before, only this was a few bucks less and everybody actually got a small refund!. On the day of the flight, we arrived at the airport in LA only to stun the crew of the plane!. We had several wives with us (mine included) and a baby (the son of Joe Hadley, who was Turret I Officer). But nothing was lost. The plane crew obtained a lot of insulation for the interior of the machine and installed it within several hours; the Red Cross loaned us several large containers for hot coffee and provided the coffee and dozens of donuts. We took off in the afternoon, made a stop in Albuquerque for gas, and then made a night flight to St. Louis where we stopped due to a very heavy snow storm. The pilot put us up in hotels, but reminded us to stay close to the phones because he wanted to leave as soon as the weather would permit. Most everybody went to the hotel bar for a drink and then turned in. Jack and Marty Muldenig (Engineering - and actually the "senior officer" in the group of 5-6 officers and 25 or so-crew members) went to a different-bar!- At about 2a.m., the pilot made his calls and we assembled in the lobby, Jack Hill included, but Marty was an absentee and, although located by the Shore Patrol, was having difficulty getting wheels to the airport due to the heavy snow in all of the streets of St. Louis. Busses took the rest *of us* to the field and the pilot said he could no longer wait for Marty. We left and flew in beautiful clear weather to our several destinations. "Almost" everybody made it home for Christmas!

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