

LETTER HOME

From: Capt. Henry Roenigk M.D. 0-1693521

25th Bomb Sq. 40th Bomb Gp. APO 183 c/o PM San Francisco, Cal.

To: Mrs. Henry (Irene) Roenigk, 16802 Ferndale, Cleveland 11 Ohio

Labor Day 1945 (from Tinian 9/3/45)

Dearest Pal:

Today is an anniversary of a sort - it was Labor Day 3 years ago that we all traveled down to Patterson Field - remember? Besides, this is the first full day of actual world Peace, & to celebrate it I'm going to send you the story of what I did yesterday, - my only excuse for no letter on V-J day.

I knew several days ago I was going on the flight - Col. Kingsbury told me (my squadron C.O. - picture enclosed) but I didn't say anything in my letters because I knew you would worry until you got a later letter saying I was back. At 10:45 Saturday night we went to briefing. It was to be an all out mission, - about 15 planes from our squadron. We were to fly through the night to an assembly point way north of Tokyo, circle Tokyo in a 200 mile circle twice, & then return to base.

I was flying with Col. Kingsbury in the lead ship of the first formation. The ship was marked with a large number 1, & on the tail, as on the tail of all ships in this group was S (this is in case you see the news reels)

Right after briefing I went to chow with several medical & dental officers (about 1:30 P.M.) We ate scrambled eggs & bread & butter & coffee. After a short discussion, we went out to the planes, among the medics, another medical officer (Capt Armstrong) two dentists, & one enlisted man were scheduled to make the trip, - all on different planes.

I reached my plane at 12:40, - almost midnight, & an hour before takeoff. Being the lead ship, we were to take off ahead of the others & a little early. This was quite a different trip than usual, - ordinarily only men whose business require them go on missions; but this time anyone could go with the permission of his Sq. Commander, - provided there was room. Each plane had room for 5 - besides the crew. At the plane waiting in addition to the crew (Col Kingsbury was the pilot) were myself, a naval commander, an intelligence officer (Frank Cahill, Capt), the squadron executive officer (Major Knight), & the group gunnery officer. In addition, the crew was made up almost entirely of "old area" men - men who came over with the original bunch in India. So you can see, it was a congenial bunch, - I knew them all well, except the Commander, & he was a pleasant fellow. At 1:05 Sunday Morning we climbed aboard. I sat in the radar room for takeoff. One by one the engines were started & checked. All was OK, we taxied out to the runway. The takeoff is always the most dangerous part of the trip. There is a short period there where any failure on the part of an engine could be serious. But tonight we aren't carrying bombs. We are much lighter than usual, a mere 62 tons of metal hurtling down the runway at 130 miles an hour - & then we bounce off. The smoothness of flight reveals you have left the ground, - I looked out the side blister, the ground & the lights of the field were receding rapidly. This then was it, - we were on our way to see the Jap Empire. No heavy flak suits to wear, no cringing as we reached landfall, this time we were on a sight-seeing tour. A "Display of Power" they called it. By now we had sufficient altitude to see the whole Island of Tinian, - with more lights than downtown Cleveland & we were on course. The Commander, Frank, the radar officer & I were in the radar room, - we made ourselves as comfortable as possible & I laid down for a nap. Oh yes, for takeoff we all had on our mae west & parachute, - now we took off the parachute, - but the Mae west would stay in place until we landed back on Tinian - 17 hours later.

we took off at 10 minutes to two, - I alternately slept & read "Did She Fail" by Thorn Smith until daybreak. At briefing they had told us there was a weather front to go through & here it was, - it is just like going through a fog, you can't see more than 10 ft ahead, - but the plane doesn't slow down, - it's still going at well over 200 miles an hour. Here is where the radar comes in. He works diligently, - he has to warn the pilot of any planes in the vicinity - & there are many going the same way we are, - & he has also to warn of bad thunderheads in the vicinity, all goes well. I am sitting in the C.F.C. seat, from where I can see all around & above the plane. We are approaching the assembly point now. It is 9:00 A.M. Tinian time - 8:00 A.M. in Japan. Our assembly point is a big point of land on the eastern shore of Honshu, about 200 miles north of Tokyo. The sky is full of B29's now. They are flying at many altitudes, all trying to get into formation, of course all of our planes are at the same altitude. We dropped a smoke bomb to advertise our position, then let the nose wheel down to identify the lead ship, & started flying in a circle. Joe Pulido in plane #6 identified us almost immediately - he peeled off & fell in, - on our left wing in almost nothing flat, - but Dusty Childs was right behind him, & he took the right wing position. Thereafter they came in almost too fast to count, until we had 11 planes. Now we were ready to start our big circle, - down to Tokyo, over Yokohama & out to sea, & back to our starting point, then one more circle & then back to Tinian. I went back & opened the rear escape hatch to wave to the dentist Capt. Arnold riding in #6. He recognized me & waved back.

Japan from 8000 ft. is a rather pretty country, much like China, there are many terraces, & all available land is cultivated. There are many mountains & trees, & villages are numerous. Here & there are nice large homes, a big seashore resort, an occasional factory. Roads appear fairly modern. There are lots of places our bombs didn't touch! But we are going pretty fast, & now Tokyo is just ahead. Tokyo is a sight. Mile after mile of the urban area is completely gutted, looks a dull brown from the air. Radio Tokyo was right when they said cultivation of these areas would give them much more food, there is a lot of empty space, but I didn't see any sign of cultivation. Here & there a building still stands, stark & naked, walls of concrete only. The Imperial Palace looks quite normal, there is no sign of fire damage there, so far as I could see.

But we have turned, our formation of eleven planes is headed toward Yokohama & Tokyo Bay. Below us is the Super battleship

Missouri, it is about 9:30 Tokyo time (later we learned the signing had just been completed). Its guns are all pointed straight up, on deck you could see row on row of white specks. It looked like an Annapolis graduation. Nearby were plenty of these battleships, & I saw at least 4 hospital ships, over in dock were many Japanese ships, subs, & big vessels, some not yet completed. Things were going on now too fast to see it all. At the mouth of the bay another task force is coming in, apparently more troops.

This was the payoff. I wonder what the Japs thought of it all, there were a lot of formations like ours, & photographic planes were coming over every so often to take pictures, & I'm sure there were photographers downstairs, & we were flying a very good close formation. We circled again, then headed for home, but this letter is getting too long. When we got back we stopped at the Dispensary, had a little Medicinal whiskey, went to chow, took a bath & went to bed. And so ended VJ day, don't you think it was fun?

That's all for now my love, except to tell you I love you three, & I'm coming home as soon as the Army will let me, & I'm quite sure I'll not be in the Army of occupation.

Henry

H. Roenigk Capt., 0-1693521, 25th Bomb Sq, 40th Bomb Grp, APO 183 c/o P.M., San Francisco, Cal.