

# Souvenir of war

Hirohito's Imperial Palace was strictly off limits to Allied bombers



SUBMITTED PHOTO/FOR DUNN COUNTY NEWS

American authorities hoped that this aerial photograph of the distinctive shape of the grounds and waterways of the Imperial Palace would help allied pilots in preventing the bombing and destruction of this Japanese holy place. According to early Japanese folklore, the emperor was a divine figure, but on Jan. 1, 1946, Emperor Hirohito declared such beliefs false. In 1967, a new \$20 million Imperial Palace was built.

By JOHN RUSSELL  
CORRESPONDENT

It was sometime around the second week of April 1945 when my ship, the USS Shipley Bay CVE 85, tied up at a pier in Alameda, Calif., to pick up supplies for a return to the South Pacific.

I picked up the usual supply of 16 mm and 35 mm movie film, an ample amount of 4x5 and 620 film and a good supply of aerial film for the lab on the ship. Then, of course, there were a good number of cans, bottles and boxes of chemicals for processing film and prints. I was startled, however, when I spotted the giant stack of double weight photographic paper standing in the midst of the supplies.

#### Minor mystery

Puzzled, I asked the supply clerk, "Why all of the paper?" He just shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know; it's on the order."

I loaded the material into the photography lab, a two-room space that included my office and filing cabinets in the front room as well as hot and cold running water, a series of stainless steel sinks, an enlarger, a contact printer and dryer, storage space for supplies — and two bunks for me and my assistant. I quickly filled the shelves with the supplies, then slipped into my dress "blues" and took the bus across the bay to see what shows were appearing at the Curran and Geary theatres. It had become a routine of mine on every visit to San Francisco.

I never gave the over-supply of photo paper another thought. I had heard we were headed for combat, and we all knew it was Okinawa.

Twenty-four days later, on May 7, 1945, the Shipley Bay steamed into Kerama Rhetto, a cluster of islands about 20 miles off the southern point of Okinawa. We only had one plane on board the carrier, an OS2U Kingfisher, a slow float plane that was to be used in observation.

#### That sinking feeling

With the constant threat of kamikaze attacks — especially to a vulnerable carrier that was a "sitting duck" tied up to a pier — our deck crew quickly lowered the Kingfisher to the water, only to see it disappear into the depths of the sea. Someone forgot to put the caps on the floats of the plane that we had carried to the battle half way around the world.

With that disaster and no possibility of retrieving the plane from the depths of the sea, our ship quickly returned to the open sea. Within the sight and the sounds of the ongoing invasion of the Naha area of Okinawa, we received the VC-97 Squadron with its complement of F-4F Wildcat fighter planes and TBF Avengers as well as the 46 officers who flew them.

During the transfer of planes and pilots from the USS Makassar Strait CVE-91, one of the pilots had an attack of appendicitis. He decided to land on the airfield at Naha instead of the carrier. He was lucky. The Marines were in the last stages of pushing the Japanese defenders off the airport, but the hapless pilot needed medical care and none was available at the airstrip.

We sent an Avenger with a crew of three to pick the ailing

pilot and bring him to our ship where John Quincy Adams VI was the surgeon. That crisis averted, our ship now was battle ready. Within the next nine days, our planes dropped 51 tons of bombs and launched 511 rockets.

Then on May 16, 1945, the Tokyo Rose warned our little flotilla of six "Jeep" aircraft carriers that the kamikazes were coming after us. We were scheduled to be refueled at sea that day, a fact that caused much concern and, as it turned out, too much haste.

Refueling is a time when both the carrier and tanker are linked together by hoses that transfer the aviation gasoline to the carrier. Aware of a possible attack, especially after the kamikaze warning, the gasoline was pumped into the carrier with too much pressure, causing a rupture in the tank and spreading dangerous fumes throughout the ship. Our ship, now a virtual "bomb," was sent to Guam for repairs.

#### Off limits

It was about this time when I was given a negative of an aerial view of the Imperial Palace of Japan and ordered to print thousands of copies of the photograph that would be distributed to every pilot in our S2.1.1 Task Force of six carriers and throughout the fleets of other carriers that would be involved in the invasion of Japan.

American army, marine and naval officials were well aware that Emperor Hirohito was a god in the eyes of the Japanese people. To bomb into oblivion the emperor's palace would only increase the resistance against the invasion of allied forces.

Hirohito had said that Japan would surrender on only the one condition — that the sovereign power of the emperor be retained. A swift response from the Allies stated that "... only

unconditional surrender was acceptable, and the Emperor was to be 'subject to' the Supreme Allied Commander."

Those thousands of photographs of the Imperial Palace were never distributed, but it was an attempt to avoid complications in the war with Japan.

General George C. Marshall had made tentative plans to invade the Japanese island of Kyushu on Nov. 1, 1925, with an allied force of 190,000, resulting in the death and wounding of more than 69,000. A second phase of the invasion of Honshu was scheduled for March 1946.

#### Little more than souvenirs

Our lab on ship continued to print the pictures of the palace after our carrier was repaired and our squadron concentrated on bombing the airfields on Ishigahki, Miyako and Sakashima, with more than 55 tons of bombs and 1,428 rockets as well as the aircrafts' machine guns. We lost one pilot, Lt. (jg) William Waters when his Wildcat was shot down over Ishigahki.

On June 22, 1945, we left the area for Ulithi where we joined Task Group 30.8. By August of that year, after the explosion of the two atom bombs, it became clear that the photographs of the Imperial Palace were little more than a souvenir of the battle with Japan.

I am not certain, but judging from the number of prints of the palace our lab turned out, we may have been the only source of the pictures for the invading naval pilots and their attacks on Japan. At least I finally knew why I had picked up so much photo paper at Alameda.

JOHN RUSSELL, a local photographer and Dunn County resident, writes a weekly column for *The Dunn County News*. He is curator emeritus of the *Dunn County Historical Society*.

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