

Excerpt from the writings of Dixie Smith

Story of Phil and Hal Smith

Two brothers aboard USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) and USS *Franklin* (CV-13)

[...] Kermit and his family probably felt more stress. Kermit was a little older and all of his older brothers and sister joined the armed forces and left to help fight the war, as he did as soon as he turned 18. It changed their whole life. My father was too old to be drafted into the Military and my brother was only 8 years old when the war started. Consequently no one in my immediate family went away to war. The streets were filled with young men in uniform of the armed forces, but they were not my family.

As people drove past houses, they could see stars in the front windows. There was a blue star on a very small flag for every soldier from their family, and when a member of their family was killed in the war, the blue star was changed to gold. Some families had small cloth flags with four or five stars in their window. Grandma and Grandpa Smith had a small flag of four stars in their window, representing four of their children in the service during World War II—Phil, Hal, Celia and Kermit.

Phil was in the South Pacific on an aircraft carrier called the USS *Enterprise*. When the *Big E* went to sea it was nearly two years before it returned.

In Phil's words: "I tell my grandchildren about the 'Last Attack', on May 14, 1945, as a single *Zeke* came from behind clouds, about 0700, and headed straight for the *Big E*. We were at General Quarters, all the hatches battened down, all men at their battle stations. I was assigned fire extinguisher near our shop. I could not see the action, but I heard the five inch guns, the 40mm, and the 20mm, then the crash and explosion. The plane had gone through the flight deck and stopped in a corner of the No. 1 elevator pit. The 500 lb bomb had broken loose and went to the 4th deck, which was armor plated, and exploded in a room where rags for wiping oil off planes, toilet tissue, and other soft items were stored. The force of the explosion went straight up and carried about 9 tons of the elevator over 400 feet in the air. Fire erupted but damage control men got the fire under control within minutes after the blast. A photographer from the ship next to us took the photo of the blast with the elevator at about 400 feet above the flight deck. The loss of life was minimal, 13 dead and 68 injured. I learned about concussion. We had about 80 planes on the hangar deck and everyone was damaged by concussion. We stripped the planes of radio and radar gear, engines were removed, and the twisted bodies were pushed over the aft end of the flight deck. What about the pilot of the *Zeke*? If the impact of the plane with the ship did not kill him, concussion from the blast did. Chaplin Tower insisted on a short memorial service for the pilot. I and a few others went with the Chaplin to the fantail, where he offered a prayer and the body was committed to the briny deep."

At the end of the war, the USS *Enterprise* went to Europe to bring back soldiers and planes, and landed in New York which made it possible for Phil to meet Eleanor, whom he later married.

Hal was a radio gunner in a torpedo plane aboard the USS *Franklin* CV-13. Hal went on missions to bomb territories in the South Pacific, including Japan.

On March 18, 1945 Hal was in the airplanes which bombed Izumi air base on the southern island of Japan. Hal was in the belly of a three-man torpedo bomber as radio man using Morse code. He also had a thirty caliber machine gun which pointed down from the belly of the airplane. They also bombed Kagoshima shipyards. Hal writes, "I was on the afternoon raid and it was quite an affair. We took off about noon, joined up with the other planes, and were off on our first combat mission. We climbed steadily so that by the time we sighted the Japanese coast we were at 19,000 ft. Believe me it was cold up there and we nearly froze. Our target was an airfield nearly across the Island of Kyushu. Soon after we were over land I spotted two airfields on our Starboard. On our Port was a big race track and I thought at the time that it would make me feel a lot better if the Japs were watching a race instead of standing behind guns to shoot at us. I thought of a lot of places I would rather have been than where I was with a load of bombs to drop on them. Honestly, it doesn't make sense for people to be shooting each other up, but then—. On our Port I could see a group of volcanic mountains, some of which had water in the

hollow on top. We flew over these mountains and the target was dead ahead. Russ, the pilot, called back to us, 'Okay boys, this is it, get ready to go in.' So he pushed over into a glide at about 12,000 ft. He pulled up a bit then pushed on over; one of the chutes fell into my lap and I quickly set it aside. I was watching to see what we hit but when the field came to my view bombs were bursting all over the place that I wasn't a bit sure where ours hit; however, I am sure that they were right in there. We dropped the bombs between four or five thousand ft then kept right on going until we hit about 1500 feet when we pulled out and high tailed it across the bay."

The following day the Japanese retaliated by bombing the USS *Franklin* CV-13. Hal writes, "The next morning at about 0645 I rolled out of my sack and got ready to go to chow with one of the other fellows. The planes were taking off on their morning strikes as we made our way to the chow hall. We had slept late because we weren't scheduled to fly until the afternoon hop. My friend, Jim Paine, and I just got through the chow line when things became mixed up. Boom! Boom! And the chow hall was a riot as the fellows tried to get to their battle stations. The fellows were trapped and couldn't get out because the entire hanger deck above us was on fire. The forward chow hall was in shambles, and they all ended up in the part of the chow hall where I was because the ship was tipping. They finally got some semblance of order in the place and we were told to sit on the deck where the smoke wasn't so bad. We were confined in this manner for over an hour and could hear the awful explosions that were going on above us. We were wondering how long it would keep up and how we would ever get out. There was a Lieutenant who knew the ship pretty well and he finally took a few men out with him to see if they could make it. They made it alright; then he came back for the rest of us. The smoke and fumes in the center chow hall were terrible and we had to hold onto or keep touching the man ahead of us in order to follow him. We finally came to an air vent which led to the outside of the ship, and it was through this that we climbed and crawled to freedom and fresh air. Boy, what a relief to be out in the open once again - (I thanked my Heavenly Father that he delivered me from that great danger and it stands as a testimony of the Mercy of God). We climbed down into a forty mm. gun mount on the starboard side and made our way forward to the ladder going up to the flight deck. The flight deck was strewn with fire hoses and trash, while men were still fighting the blaze which was raging from the island structure on aft. There was a group of men up forward so I made my way to them, from them I got a rough outline as to the cause of our plight. One Jap plane made it past our defenses and dropped two 500-pound bombs on our deck. It then beat it but was shot down a few minutes later by our fighters. The damage was done. Most of our planes were still on the deck and were blown to bits by the bombs and gas in them. All of the TBM's were loaded with 500 pounders ready to hit the Jap fleet at Kobe and Kure. The eight bombers that were still on the deck were also loaded heavily, while there were several *Tiny Tims* (our biggest airborne rockets) loaded on the fighters on the aft end of the flight deck. The Jap bombs only set off the fireworks and our own weapons did the most of the damage. The job of destruction was nearly complete.

At first we were afraid nearly all of our men were killed, but later we found that most of them had gone over the fantail and were picked up by accompanying destroyers."

A heavy cruiser towed the USS *Franklin* CV-13 away from Japan to Ulithi where it was partially repaired so it could make its way to Pearl Harbor. The rescued sailors were put on the USS *Santa Fe*, a cruiser, to be taken to Ulithi, a four-day trip. Ulithi was a Naval base in the South Pacific. On the USS *Santa Fe*, it was almost wall to wall rescued sailors, where they slept on the hard deck or where ever they could. When they arrived at Ulithi base, there were about 3 damaged aircraft carriers including the USS *Enterprise* where Hal knew that Phil was. The *Enterprise* had also been hit so it also had to come to Ulithi. Hal begged the men operating the light on the top of the *Santa Fe* to send a message in Morse code, with the light atop the ship, to the *Enterprise* to let Phil know that Hal was safe and that he was on the *Santa Fe*. Phil then hitch hiked on the water, begging rides on small ships to find the *Santa Fe* where Hal was. Hal said, "Shortly afterwards we were transferred to the USS *General Scott*, a troop ship where we spent the night and the next day. It was Sunday and I missed out on the LDS meeting because I was up on the bridge sending another blinker message to Phil... That evening we were transferred to the USS *Oneida* for transport to Guam. The next morning, March 26, I sent another message to the *Big E* to let Phil know where I was. It was getting late and I was about to think he couldn't make it. He did show up though." After about a 20 mile search there was an hour long reunion between two brothers, complete with tears of gratitude for safety. Hal said he was never as happy to see anyone in his whole life as he was at that moment to see Phil. Hal

said "And so it was that after a day and a half my beloved brother caught up with me. And then the hour that he had to stay passed only too quickly..." Many of these sailors were 20-year old kids who would rather be at home. We need to be thankful to them and many others like them for the freedom that we enjoy. It was bought with a price.