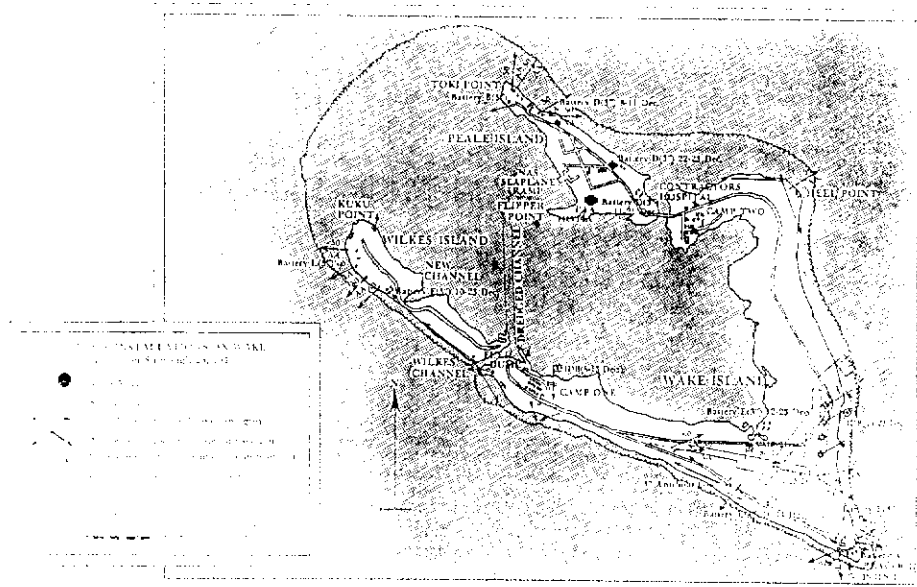


DASPO Films What's Left Of WWII On Wake & Guam

Wake Island just a dot of land in the Pacific Ocean, comprised of beachrock and coral atoll, no more than 20 feet above sea level and barely five miles long, sits within the tropic of Cancer, with its position just North of the Marshall Islands is closer to the Japanese Homeland than to Hawaii, was of vital strategical military importance for both the U.S. and Japanese Governments at the outset of World War II, in the Pacific War Theater. The fact was, the United States owned the three island, Wake, Wilkes and Peale that make up Wake Island. At the start of WWII, Wake Island had a tiny garrison of 388 marines, a 12 plane squadron of F4F (Wildcat) Fighters of VMF 211, and 1146 man civilian contractor work force, to protect the American interest on the island. Pan American World Airways used Wake as a major trans-Pacific stop-over, including a 45 room hotel for passengers and maintenance facilities for Pan Am's China Clippers (Flying Boats.) Within Hours of the devastating tragedy at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese set their sites on the tiny island and the sparsely defended Wake Island defenders. The Japanese thought in theory this offensive should be a simple mop-up operation, having bombed the island for 20 days out of a three week period, but proved to be America's bright light in the bleak days following Pearl Harbor. The bravery, heroism tenaciousness of the marines and inexpugnable resolve, dealt the Imperial Japanese Navy defeat after defeat for days on end. With the help of the island's 3 and 5 inch coastal guns and VMF 211 improvising the Wildcats from fighters into bombers, sank two Japanese war ships and hitting five others ships, causing extensive damage and death to those onboard the vessels, aborted multi-shore invasion attempts by the enemy, and created a national euphoric stateside over Wake Island defense to the extent that Hollywood commenced production on the movie version of Wake Island, within a fortnight of the outbreak of hostilities and while the battle for Wake Island ensued. As an adolescent, I'd seen the war movie Wake Island, starring William Bendix several times. Then departing Korea, in Feb. 1964, the DC-6 I was flying back to the states on, landed on this infamous WWII locale for refueling.

DASPO Films What's Left of WWII On Wake & Guam



During the fall of 1966, DASPO Pacific Detachment had an over incumbered agenda, not only a full time 12 to 14 man team in Vietnam on a 90 day rotational basis, but the government, at least the army had aspirations of producing a movie of what was left of World War II around the world, for the Silver Annnsiversary to commemorate the end of hostilities in 1970. Much of the filming for this project was DASPO's mission.

A five man DASPO Team flew out of Honolulu for Wake Island on the 28th of Nov, 1966, aboard a Trans-International Air Force charter jet. Deplaning for an eight day stay, the DASPO Team was greeted by the FAA (Federal Aviation Agency) who were administrating the island on behalf of the U.S. Government. We were told the FAA had less than two dozen employees on the island, mainly keeping the airport open for business. However with the advent of the jet age, planes could fly directly from Honolulu to Manila, The Philippines, by passing Wake. Wake Island's usefulness was reduced to nil, except for inflight emergencies and resupply aircraft. During our eight days, I only recall two or three aircraft using the airport.

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The FAA officials showed the team a 20 plus page history of the island for the DASPO Team to read and take notes. They had no Xerox machine to make a copy and were reluctant to let the document out of their sight, thus read quickly and scribble notes with equal speed. The context showed Marine Corps Major Devereux and Navy Commander Cunningham were jointly in charge during the battle for Wake Island. The documents also relayed that during the 3 years and eight months of Japanese occupation, only two enemy resupply ships slipped through the U.S. blockade of the island, giving testimony to the successful naval submarine vigilants around Wake Island. The notes stated that food was so scarce that the POW's and Japanese made a broth using plant roots and leaves. The papers described starvation and disease rampant among the POWs and Japanese occupational forces.

The documents told how the marines with the help of civilian contractors carrying ammo aided with sinking one Japanese ship from coastal gun fire and damaging others. How the VMF-211 planes using 100 pound bombs sank a second ship. How and where the first invasion attempt took place with notes on how the marines repulsed the invasion and many other pertinent data concerning the battle for Wake. The team learned of Pan Am's operation on the island. The precious documents described the command bunker from which Maj. Devereux and Commander Cunningham controlled the American forces. SFC William Myers is standing in the entrance to the bunker. The documents told how a fleet carrying supplies and marine re-enforcements only 450 miles from Wake, was ordered back to Pearl Harbor, when word was received that Wake Island was under attack, leaving the Wake defenders to their own fate.

The paper said some of the civilian contractors were kept alive rebuilding the islands fortification, believing the U.S. would counter-attack. The marines and many contractors were shipped off to POW camps mostly in China.

The FAA provided the DASPO Team with a vehicle to travel around the island complex. The team was able to see and film the beaches where the 3 and 5 inch coastal guns once stood, that brought havoc and barrages of artillery fire onto the approaching Japanese fleet. We filmed the shore lines where the marines slain hundreds of Japanese invasion troops with withering machine gun cross fire as the Japanese waded across the coral reef at low tide, mowing down battalions at a time.

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The team filmed monuments to both the Americans and Japanese who died fighting for Wake Island. The DASPO Crew saw a British naval gun, either 5 or 8 inch, varying documents give different size for the weapon. The Japanese captured a British war ship, when Singapore fell to the Imperial Forces. The gun and ammo was transported to Wake, to bolster the island's defenses. The DASPO Team saw the fuel storage tanks on Wilkes Island and a Japanese bunker and tunnel complex on Peale Is. The team saw signs that EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) Teams were still active neutralizing WWII munitions on the three islands.

The
The team witnessed the rock around were huddled contractor personnel in the unrelenting hot sun, into which the POWs scratched " 98 US PW 10 May 43. The Daspo Team while crawling around the underbrush came upon a huge concrete foundation that had to have been the Pan Am Hotel.

Two years earlier I spent two months filming a major biological expedition to desert island in the Central Pacific, working with Fred C. Sibley of the Smithsonian Institution Division of Birds. On that voyage I became a "SHELLBACK" crossing the equator on a navy ship. Six months later I was awarded "THE GOLDEN SHELLBACK" for crossing the equator at the International Dateline. That's not common for navy personnel and extremely rare for army soldiers. I was probably the most knowledgeable and authoritative person on Wake Island regarding the wildlife present.

I had expected to see an extensive aviary and hoped to see some Albatross, but was very disappointed on both counts. A few shore birds were seen. They are birds that migrate from the tropics to temperate and arctic regions to breed. One species of Booby was spotted several times. I don't recall if it was a Brown, Red-Footed or Blue-Footed also known as Masked Booby. I saw a few Frigate Birds hovering over the island, but couldn't tell if they were lesser or Greater Frigates, because of the distance from my position. Wake Island had a disproportional quantity of White-Tailed Tropic Birds to its brother the Red-Tailed . I saw no terns. The Sooty Tern who's flock can number over a million were missing. I saw no petrels either. Even the prolific hermit crabs were of diminished proportion on Wake Island.

DASPO Films What's Left Of WWII On Wake And Guam

Leaving Wake Island, the team broke up. I was dismayed at the concept, however I was junior man on the team. The rest headed back to Hawaii, while SSG Frank Salas and I flew to Guam on an Airforce C-141 Starlifter. I had been to Guam both going and returning from the 1965 Vietnam trip, and knew the island was 100 times larger than Wake. On the flight I envisioned spending a day or two at a library doing research on Guam. Little did I know that SSG Salas was born and raised on Guam. I was born during the war and SSG Salas was older than myself, thus as a child, he undoubtedly himself lived under the Japanese occupation. His parents, aunts, uncles and other relatives were all ready reference material, for our project.

For SSG Salas, it was a working vacation, living at home. Agana, Guam is the capital of Microneasia and in 1966 had only two hotels. One a large chain hotel was booked solid. The second one across from Agana's Airport was a flop house, without air conditioning and community bathrooms down the hall, but they had one room for one night. I heard a Revelon salesman tell the hotel clerk to reserve him a room for three days a month in advance. It became clear the only way I'd have a room the next evening was if one of these salemen had a flight delay, cancellation, or otherwise got stranded out in No-Man-Land. I got lucky and had a room until the 13th of Dec, however every morning I had to pack my bags ready to be evicted, while we worked filming the island.

The hotel clerk asked what my business was? I told them filming what was left of World War II on Guam. The locals cautioned me against going up into the mountains. They flatly stated that a few years earlier a Japanese turned himself in that had hid in the mountains still fighting the war. They continued; that one knew of other still up there fighting the war 21 years after the war ended.

Others in the hotel lobby overhearing the conversation joined in. Older people didn't enter the group discussion. They wanted to forget the nightmare and torture they suffered at the hands of the Japanese. In unison many stated the catholic church had been a hub of torture for the Guamanians.

DASPO Films What Left Of WWII On Wake & Guam

SSG Salas using a family member's vehicle drove us to the Southern tip of Guam to film Ferdinand Magellan's burial site. At the same time film the military pier where bombs were being off loaded for their trip to Anderson AFB and squadrons of B-52s were based.. Mostly we saw 750 and 1000 pound bombs some trucks carried what I believed were 2000 pound bombs. Looking through the slides I didn't find any bomb laden truck, nor the soviet troller stationed out to sea monitoring the B-52 activity. So far I didn't find a hidden shore battery the Japanese used either.

Another day we drove up into the hills. The Guamainians call the area Tank Hill, because it was the site of a tank battle.. There we filmed a marine corps half-track and an american tank destroyed, along with a Japanese tank knocked out of action. We witnessed an EOD Team setting charges to detonate some WWII munitions in the vicinity of Tank Hill. We followed the EOD Team to their headquarters where they had on display unexploded Japanese battleship 14 inch shell and an american battleship's 16 inch projectile. We couldn't budge either round. The EOD people told us the american projectile weighted a ton and could be hurdled 21 miles.

The beaches of Agana Bay were important to our story. The Japanese came ashore there taking control of the island. Then 2½ years later the americans used the same beaches to re-take Guam from the Japanese. Agana Bay was divided into two beaches Nimitz and Truman Beaches. Orote Point was another important invasion locale. Orote Point is a cliff North of Agana Bay. I think the americans climbed the cliffs, but the Japanese had dug bunkers into the cliffs and installed shore battery guns, to wipe out the invading American fleet. We filmed the tunnels and hidden guns while being eaten alive by mosquitoes.

SSG Salas and I travelled to Anderson AFB. At the end of the runway is a cliff that was the site of the last ditch stand for the Japanese Army. Refusing to surrender the Imperial soldiers leaped to their death from the cliff. we were told Japanese wives holding children and infants likewise committed Hari Kari rather than give up. In all about 500 bodies were found at the base of the cliff, at war's end.

DASPO Films What's Left Of WWII On Wake & Guam

K-9 Dogs were an intricate part of the U.S. plan to free Guam of the Japanese. We filmed the dog cemetery on the outskirts of Agana. The cemetery showed more dogs were killed to liberate Guam than I would have figured. We also filmed the catholic church that was center stage for Japanese horror and torture to so many Guamanians. While the church was rebuilt it sits on the original site.

To tie much of the ground footage together, the Salas Family had a member who was a helicopter pilot in the reserves or national guard. Anyhow we got the use of a helo to take aerials one afternoon. We flew out to sea shooting the entire Agana Bay with Agana in the background with both Truman and Nimitz Beaches. Then we flew South of Agana filming Northward showing both beaches and the town, with Orote Point in the background. Turning we filmed Orote Point with Agana and the bay in the rear.. The pilot took us up to Tank Hill and filmed all three destroyed vehicles up there. We also could see the distance Agana was from tank Hill.

Then the pilot flew out to sea to a ship. I saw the hammer and sickle on the flag, but it didn't register in my brain that this fishing sized ship was a Russian Troller spying on the B-52 activities at Anderson AFB, and their mission of flying raids into North and South Vietnam.

William Foulke

William Foulke

DASPO Member

Written July 2004