Chapter 26

Miscellaneous Stuff

My name is Gail O’Reilly. I have red hair and green eyes. I was 32 in 1944.

Darkness and fire was just about all I could see in this death trap of a plane the military keeps flying me around in. The flak from anti aircraft guns is what really the deadly part is though, and I’ve already seen a man get hit by a bunch when moving about, securing our payloads or unsecuring them for our drop points. New York City doesn’t have anything this extreme or intense where I’m from. The most happening and the most dangerous part to watch out for is the business men that are running late for work or the construction going on downtown. My job has always been safe, though, working as a journalist and reporter for the New York Times. My job is so demanding that I don’t have a wife or any children back home, so if I die here, only this bunch of soldiers will know who I am.

The jolting of the plane again shook my hand and screwed up another letter as I tried to write of all that I was seeing up here. The army thinks they are so funny by sending me up here for almost every bombing raid. They keep flying me all over, too, to catch any new invasions on plans taking place. By the end of the war, I feel like I’ll have seen more of Asia than most of the Asians themselves.

The mission I was currently on was a raid over the heart of Japan. The night was June 15/16 as we flew over. This was the first raid over the Japanese islands since the Doolittle raid in April of 1942. My plane along with 46 other B-29s based in Bengal, India was the chosen group to target the steel works at Yawata. All of these raids and attacks did give me an appreciation to the other men fighting over here. The raid went off smoothly and all the planes safely made it back to base. Unfortunately, the brass around here had me shipped off again to another part of the ocean, supposedly for some low level invasion in the next few months.

I was on one of the boats that would start the invasion as U.S. troops would soon be invading Morotai and the Palaus islands. Finally, the invasion began with many soldiers fighting up onto the beaches and sandbars. For months, the boys fought on and I reported everything I saw and heard when I was finally permitted to land. The fighting was long and brutal for both sides and many lives were lost. For the campaign on Palau, 10,695 Japanese soldiers were killed and only 19 survived and surrendered. For the 1st Marine Division, 1,252 were killed in action and 542 of the Army’s 81st Division. The fighting there finally ended December 1. Fighting in Morotai lasted over a month longer when it finally ended on January 14. The fighting was by far less bloody and minimal lives were lost there. Only 870 Japanese lost their lives with only 10 captured, and 46 Americans died and 104 wounded.

During this battle, I received some word of the other fighting and battles somewhere else in the Pacific. On October 11, the U.S. launched an air raid against the island of Okinawa. A month later on November 11, the U.S. air and naval powers launched a massive bombardment on the island of Iwo Jima. On November 24, twenty-four B-29s bombed the Nakajima aircraft factory near Tokyo. For the next year, on January 3, General MacArthur was placed in command of all U.S. ground forces and Admiral Nimitz in command of all naval forces in preparation for the planned assaults against Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and Japan itself.

About two months later, I was brought to another air base in preparation for another raid on the cities of Japan. While waiting around for the mission, I received news of a horrible occurrence off in the Pacific. On March 1, a U.S. submarine sunk a Japanese merchant ship. However, the horrible news is that it was loaded with supplies for Allied POWs. The results of this were that the captain of the sub was court marshaled since the ship was granted safe passage by the U.S. government.

Not long after this news I received, the orders for the next bombing mission were given and supplies were being loaded. On the night of March 9/10, 279 B-29s flew the raid against the heart of Japan over Tokyo. By the end of the raid, 15 square miles of the city erupted in flames from the fire bombs dropped in her center. The mission had been a success, and we flew back to the base. No sooner had we arrived that a messenger told me to pack my articles because I was being transferred to another location. I was 32 years old. I guess I was going to see the last efforts for liberating the Philippines.