

Mel Sturm was on the USS Missouri when Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 7, 2017)

On May 11, 2017, the Rotary Club of Oak Ridge awarded Mel Sturm their William T. Sergeant Vocational Service Award. At the award presentation, much was said about his accomplishments, dedication to his profession and the many ways he has contributed to our community over the years. Only a brief mention was made of his service in the United States Navy during World War II.

After the award presentation meeting, I sat down with Mel and asked him about his service to our nation during World War II. He proudly spoke of his experiences in the US Navy but quickly set about telling me how fortunate he felt he was to have been on the USS Missouri when the formal surrender of the Japanese occurred ending that awful war.

Mel expressed to me that he was very young then and felt very fortunate to have been in the right place at the right time to be selected to be on that ship to witness such a tremendous and monumental occasion. He still recalls the event vividly and can still recount precisely how the ceremony unfolded.

He agreed to share some mementos from the auspicious occasion. First a "Missouri News Flash" that was presented to the men on the ship:

"EXTRA JAPAN SURRENDERS: 'At sea, off Tokyo,' 15 August 1945.

"On August 14th, 1945, President Truman announced to the people of the world that Japan had surrendered unconditionally. The announcement was made simultaneously in Washington, Moscow, London and Chungking.

"The text of the President's statement is as follows:

"I have received this afternoon a message from the Japanese Government in reply to the message forwarded to that Government by the Secretary of State³ on August 11, 1945.

"I deem this reply an acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration which specified the Unconditional Surrender of Japan.

"Arrangements are now being made for the formal signing of the Treaty at the earliest possible moment.

"General Douglas MacArthur has been appointed the supreme Allied Commander to receive the Japanese surrender.

"Great Britain, Russia and China will be represented by high ranking officers.

"Meantime the Allied Armed Forces have been ordered to suspend all offensive action.

"The Proclamation of VJ Day must wait upon the formal signing of the surrender terms by Japan.

"President Truman made this historical announcement to a huge crowd of reporters who had been virtually living in the White House for days in anticipation of just such development.

"Japan's message was delivered to Secretary of State Byrnes by the Swiss Minister in the State Department office. Secretary Byrnes immediately left his office and walked to the Executive Office at the White House.

"Later President Truman dispatched through Secretary of State Byrnes an order for the Japanese Government to halt the war on all fronts.

"Congratulations from the Secretary of the Navy"

Mel Sturm was on the USS Missouri when Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 7, 2017)

Mel also sent me the text of the message of Admiral William F. Halsey, Commander Third Fleet to the Officers and Men of the Third Fleet on 15 August 1945. I wish to share some excerpts from that document.

"The war is ended. You in conjunction with your brothers in arms of all services have contributed inestimably to this final result. ...Your names are written in golden letters on the pages of history – your fame is and shall be immortal. Wherever you have met the foe, on the sea on the land or in the air, you have been supreme. From the early days of fighting with a very frayed shoe string to the finish of fighting with the mightiest combined fleet the world has ever seen, the results have been the same - victory has crowned your efforts. The forces of righteousness and decency have triumphed.

"At this moment our thoughts turn to our happy and fortunate homeland, to our loved ones. Deeply rooted in each and every heart is a desire, now that the tumult of war has ceased and victory – absolute and unconditional victory has crowned our efforts, to return to our homes.

"A simple process of thinking will demonstrate how impossible this is at the moment. The boredom, the homesickness, the periods of fear, the tragedy, the sweat, the blood we have shed so freely, these have been endured by all with fortitude and brotherly comradeship and gladly. This is a common and proud possession of each and every rank and rating. We are and shall always remain a band of brothers tried in the fire of the greatest holocaust this world has ever experienced, and because of this, indissoluble. That which we fought and bled and died for has become a reality. That reality cannot be – must not be transient, it must rest on firm foundations. The structure that we build must be so firm that the storms of all ages to come cannot touch its surface. Because of your fighting qualities and the fighting qualities of our brother in arms of all services our beloved land has not known the ravages of war, our dear ones at home have not been endangered.

"Give praise to God Almighty for this and give humble and grateful thanks that he saw fit to use us as his instruments.

"Victory is not the end. Rather it is but the beginning. We must establish a peace, a firm, a just, and an enduring peace; a peace that will enable all decent nations to live without fear and in prosperity; a peace that will glorify the inherent dignity and nobility of mankind. ...

"...Now that the fighting has ended there must be no letdown. We shall have long and trying periods of very watchful waiting. A busy man is a happy man. It behooves all in authority to take this to heart. Plans should be in the formative period now – plans that provide work, study, and recreation. This is not only constructively necessary for the upkeep and preservation of our splendid ships but imperative for the morale of our incomparable fighting men.

"I wish it were possible for me to meet, greet, and know each officer and man of our fighting Third Fleet. Owing to its size and dispersion this cannot be. You shall always occupy a special and honored space in my mind and heart. We have been through this trying time together. We have shared the good we have

Mel Sturm was on the USS Missouri when Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 7, 2017)

shared the bad. We are brothers – blooded by our active participation in combat operations in an unprecedented naval war.

“When the time comes many will return to civilian pursuits. Keep the torch burning. Join your forces in the pursuit of righteousness and decency. You have been tried in a cruel crucible – you have, thank God, been proved not wanting. Let no man tear down that for which you have sacrificed so much. Your civic responsibilities will be great. Meet them with the same fortitude you have displayed during this war. Then shall our great land be safe and sound.

“You that remain in the Navy keep your swords sharp. You accept great responsibility. The great traditions and the constant state of preparedness of this our first line of defense are in your keeping. Maintain your powder dry and anticipate every new development. The applications change but the principles of war are immutable. God grant that we may never have to apply them again. A ready and efficient fleet is one of the greatest deterrents to the horrors of war. To you all I say I shall always be ready and glad within my means to render any advice assistance or succor.

“To our fighting brothers of the British Pacific Fleet my eternal gratitude for your efficient and generous services. I am so proud, every proud to have had you under my command during this last combat period of the Western Pacific war on the seas. We who know you expected great fighting qualities. Our expectations have been more than fulfilled. Your co-operative spirit, your manner of meeting and anticipating our wishes, the way you have adopted and fallen into our scheme of maneuvers is little short of remarkable. The coordinated offensive and defensive fighting on the surface and in the air makes us in fact a single fighting team.

“Those of us who have suffered injuries or been permanently maimed my gratitude and thankfulness that you have been spared for further useful activeness. May a grateful country never forget the sacrifices you made for the good of all mankind.

“To those of our brother that have given their all – who made the supreme sacrifice – Hail! Rest with God. The memory of you will never die. Your names and your deeds will rest with and be an inspiration to all decent mankind through all ages. To your loved ones my deepest sympathy. May time assuage your grief and bring a full realization of your dear ones’ immortal fame.

“To all of you belongs the credit. And I shall do all within my limited powers to see that you receive it. Again, and again God bless you and well done. Halsey

I hope you, as I have been, were taken back in your mind to the time of the awful war and its grateful end by reading these words. You must know that Oak Ridge played a pivotal role in bringing the bloodshed to a stop! We can take pride in the role our city and the Manhattan Project workers had in that significant resulting peace.

It has been 75 years since Oak Ridge began as a result of World War II. As we recognize that milestone, it will do us good to reflect on such events as the formal surrender that took place on the USS Missouri and the clear and precise memory of Mel Sturm, who was there!

Mel Sturm was on the USS Missouri when Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 7, 2017)

As you well know, not many of those alive then remain with us today. If you know someone who is like Mel, take the time to talk to them and let them know how much their service is appreciated.



Mel Sturm