



Images courtesy of George J. Grimm.

This Japanese 5-yen short-snorter was autographed by U.S. Navy Fleet Adm. Chester W. Nimitz (see arrow) while on his way to sign the Japanese surrender documents in Tokyo in 1945. Lt. George J. Grimm, at right, is shown standing on the wing of his PB2Y Coronado "flying boat" shortly after landing in Tokyo Bay. Grimm flew Adm. Nimitz to Tokyo for the signing.



## SHORT-SNORTERS

### Hand-signed autographs on U.S. and world paper money transform WWII-era notes into a record of historical events

By Michele Orzano

Imagine finding paper money that talks! "Talking" notes do exist. They are known as short-snorters and most often they live in scrapbooks, or are tucked away in boxes sitting in the back of closets or sometimes they can be found between the pages of a long-forgotten journal.

These aging pieces of paper bear the handwritten signatures of military comrades-in-arms, Red Cross volunteers and even a celebrity or two.

While what these mementos say is not heard audibly, the names and dates scrawled on the notes speak clearly as

eyewitnesses to history. And, because history is a subject near and dear to the heart of collector Tom Sparks, these notes are rising up to tell their stories.

#### The Short Snorter Project

On July 4, 2007, Sparks created an online gallery called the Short Snorter Project. He said he estimates he has about 200-plus short-snorter note images on the Web site.

Sparks offers a simple definition of a short-snorter note: "a piece of paper money upon which signatures were exchanged between those traveling together or meeting up at different events. The tradition was started by bush pilots in Alaska in the 1920's and subsequently spread, through the growth of commercial and military aviation. If you signed a short-snorter and that person could not produce it upon request, they owed you a dollar or a drink."

He said the name for these autographed notes came from the slang for an alcoholic drink, often referred to as a "short snort."

Sparks said his dad started him collecting coins in 1966. He said he still has his "original Whitman Lincoln penny folder" and in addition to coins, he has also collected comics, stamps, encased coins and tokens.

Before 2002 Sparks admits he didn't really know much about short-snorters but he was about to find a mission for his life.

That year, while reading an article about these paper souvenirs, Sparks became intrigued with the stories behind the handwritten names, dates and sometimes brief messages on the notes.

His interest in the subject grew in 2003 while he was visiting an old farmer for whom he used to work. Sitting at the farmer's kitchen table, Sparks said he noticed a model airplane, commonly known as a "flying boat," and a copy of a war stories magazines.

When Sparks asked the farmer, George



Images courtesy of Bob Crump.

This Series 1935A \$1 silver certificate short-snorter, at right, bears the signature of entertainer Bob Hope (see arrow). The short-snorter belongs to John W. "Wild Bill" Crump, above, posing in the cockpit of his fighter plane with his coyote mascot he named Jeep.



www.coinworld.com





Images courtesy of Richard Newton.  
Pilot Archie E. Newton Jr., below, brought home this Series 1935A \$1 silver certificate, at left, after his service with the China National Aviation Corp. in the 1940s. Capt. Russell W. Coldren (see arrow for signature), a fellow pilot, was killed on Jan. 6, 1945, during a storm while he was flying over the Himalaya Mountains. The plane wreckage was not found until 2002.



Grimm, if he had any short-snorters, Grimm brought out a scrapbook of his experiences with the U.S. Naval Transport Service in the Pacific during World War II. Grimm flew a PB2Y Coronado flying boat.

During the ensuing conversation Sparks discovered that Grimm was one of three pilots that flew U.S. Navy Fleet Adm. Chester W. Nimitz and his staff from Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands to Tokyo in late August 1945.

Nimitz and other military officers were to participate in the Sept. 2 signing of the Japanese surrender documents aboard the *USS Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay.

"He never told me about this in the two years I worked for him," Sparks said, still astonished at the eyewitness account Grimm recalled.

Sparks acknowledges that many World War II veterans have a matter-of-fact approach to their military service. Many veterans' family members are unaware of the details of their service or the history they made.

Grimm's scrapbook proved to be a treasure trove for Sparks. Between the covers were photographs of Grimm, fellow crew members, and U.S. and world military officials. And tucked alongside the pictures

were also several Japanese and other world notes signed by flight crews and passengers.

Among Grimm's short-snorters is a Japanese 5-yen note bearing the autograph of Nimitz and others in his party including Adm. Raymond A. Spruance, best known as the commander of the 5th Fleet during the Battle of Midway; Marine Brig. Gen. Alexander Vandegrift, who commanded U.S. forces in the Battle of Guadalcanal; and Vice Adm. John Towers, who served as Nimitz's chief adviser on naval aviation policy.

Grimm also has a Japanese 50-sen note autographed by other World War II history-makers like Vice Adm. Dewitt Clinton Ramsey, who was a commander in the Battle of the Coral Seas.

Nimitz's autograph can be found on an Australia 10-shilling note along with that of other military officers headed to the *USS Missouri* for the surrender signing: Rear Adm. Richard Byrd, Rear Adm. William Tomlinson and Brig Gen. J.H. Fellows.

Shortly after learning about Grimm's short-snorters, Sparks decided to create the project Web site. He said he spends many hours researching the people and

events often only hinted at by the signatures on the notes.

He started posting images of the notes in 2007 and asking viewers for help in identifying the people behind the signatures and in some cases even deciphering the signatures.

The online gallery of short-snorter images is given added interest when Sparks is contacted by relatives of those autographing the notes. Often they fill in the blanks in Sparks' research and many have offered photos of their relatives or friends to help tell the stories behind these hand-signed pieces of currency.

These bits of paper come to life as you read the experiences of military and civilians and view the images of the short-snorters connected to those who experienced the war in faraway places.

Sparks has carefully chronicled the stories of dozens of people like:

► Combat pilot John W. "Wild Bill" Crump, who took along his coyote mascot named Jeep on five combat missions. When Crump returned stateside he became an airline pilot and airshow performer.

► Archie E. Newton Jr., who flew supplies from India to China over the Himalaya

Mountains ("The Hump") for the China National Aviation Corp. The CNAC was a commercial airline service run by Pan American Airways. Between 1942 and 1945 CNAC pilots flew unarmed planes bringing supplies into China after Japanese troops blocked the main supply

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Images courtesy of Ann Boyd.  
Told she was too old to enlist in the U.S. military forces, Florice "Folly" Langley, at left, joined the American Red Cross as a volunteer and was sent to India and Australia. The India 10-rupee note, above, is one of Langley's short-snorters from her years of service during World War II. The arrow points to the name of Capt. J.H. Watson, a pilot with the China National Aviation Corporation, who flew supplies over the Himalaya Mountains into China from India.



Continued from page 141 route from Burma into China. Most flights had to take place in cloudy weather or at night to avoid attacks by armed Japanese aircraft.

► Florice "Folly" Langley, who traveled throughout India and Australia as an American Red Cross volunteer. Langley became a Red Cross volunteer after being rejected for military service for being too old (she was in her 40s at the time). Langley met many soldiers, sailors and Marines from many countries during her service. She also met VIPs like Eleanor Roosevelt and entertainers on USO tours such as Bob Hope.

► Harry G. Pace Jr., who was shot down over German-occupied France in June 1944 but found by members of the French underground, who saved him from capture by German troops. French freedom fighters issued him a fake French ID and eventually managed to get him to England.

► Thomas O. Pierce, who flew more than 50 combat missions over North Africa, Italy and Greece in his B-25 bomber. After the war he flew POWs home from Tokyo.

## Veterans dying off

"There's a sense of urgency in this



[project]," Sparks said. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates American World War II veterans are dying at a rate of 1,000 a day. Even the youngest veterans are in their 80s. He said the project is a way to preserve the stories of those individuals.

Sparks said one of the fun things about the project is that he never knows when he's going to meet someone else with a short-snorter story.

He recalls one recent encounter happened when he was waiting for an elevator in the building where he works in downtown Seattle.

Sparks reported he was wearing his [www.shortsnorter.org](http://www.shortsnorter.org) ball cap and when the doors opened someone from inside the crowded elevator asked him if he had his short-snorter with him.

Image courtesy of Bob Chadwell.  
Thomas O. Pierce flew B-25 bombers on more than 50 combat missions over North Africa, Italy and Greece during World War II. This Series 1935A \$1 silver certificate, at left, is one of his short-snorters. The photo below shows a B-25 after it was hit by anti-aircraft fire as it falls to earth in flames.



As the elevator emptied out, the questioner, a Vietnam War veteran, introduced himself and several days later brought in some World War II-era short-snorters for Sparks to see.

Sparks said the project's mission is to educate the general public about the notes, but most important, about the men and women who signed them. The two primary goals of the project "are to place permanent displays in prominent museums and to attend large gatherings to communicate the tradition of the short-snorter."

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Sparks volunteers at monthly "fly day" events hosted by the Flying Heritage Collection, a collection of working military planes at Paine Field in Everett, Wash.

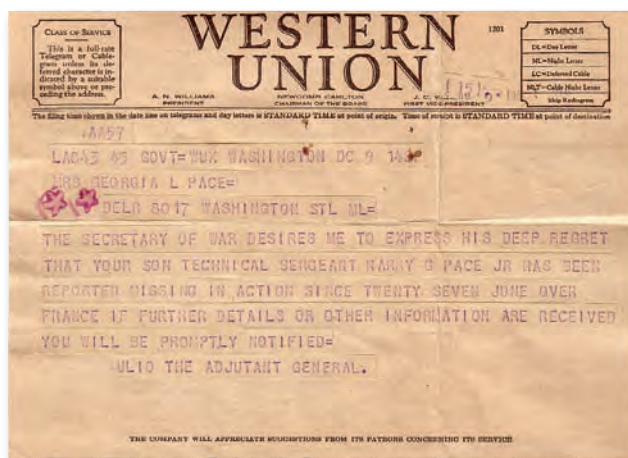
He also volunteers at War Bird Week-ends' hosted by Heritage Flight Museum, located at the Bellingham International Airport in Bellingham, Wash. The museum was founded in 1996 by former Apollo 8 astronaut William Anders and his family.

While at these events Sparks takes time to seek out veterans and ask if they have short-snorters. Most are interested in telling their stories. Recently Sparks had the opportunity to share his love of short-snorters by putting together an exhibit at the Boeing Employee's Coin Club annual show in January 2009 in Seattle. Sparks' exhibit won first place in the club's People's Choice Awards.

Sparks' exhibit also placed third in the People's Choice Awards during the American Numismatic Association National Money Show held in March 2009 in Portland, Ore.

Sparks admits to spending some late nights and weekends researching and writing the histories and descriptions for the images of short-snorters he posts on his Web site. Collectors, veterans or their family members continue to send Sparks these living pieces of history.

Listening to Sparks talk about the project, it's clear his dedication is a reflection of the



dedication exhibited by the men and women who fought for freedom. But many of their stories are yet to be fully explored.

"If I could do this full-time I'd do it in a heartbeat," Sparks said.

He said he hopes that posting the short-snorters online will enable family members or even the veterans themselves to identify the signers.

The Short Snorter Project is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit educational organization and donations are tax deductible. Donations are used to maintain the virtual museum.



Anyone wanting to make a financial donation or to offer images of short-snorters for posting on the site or information about any of the notes already posted can contact Sparks via his Web site [www.shortsnorter.org](http://www.shortsnorter.org). ■

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