

Big D & Bubba Say Arigato

Taking a radio show to Japan happens slowly at first, then all at once. At least, that was the experience for the *Big D & Bubba* crew, who recently returned from a three-stop USO tour. The experience fulfilled a longstanding ambition.

"Armed Forces Network has us in close to 200 countries and ships at sea," says **Sean "Bubba" Powell**. "We've always had a big military following and wanted to go somewhere with the USO. When the pieces finally fell into place, they asked, 'How about Japan?'"

Getting to that point involved long conversations with the USO and the Department of Defense, background checks and more. "It took close to six months, but when it was finally set we had about three weeks' notice," says producer **Patrick Thomas**.

The shows were a variety format, with **Derek "Big D" Haskins** and Bubba as hosts, supported by comedians Carly Aquilino and Jessimae Peluso. Stand-up comedy, improv, music, games and more were on the slate. "We've done three 'Game Night' shows in affiliate markets over the last year, which works better than just standing there trying to do radio," Big D says. Adds Bubba, "We didn't want to just do a handshake tour."

"We tailored the show to a military crowd, then to each base and branch," Thomas explains. "For instance, the Marines at Camp Fuji are literally 300 people on the side of a mountain. No families." Bubba says, "It was cold rain and snow, and that crowd was really primed to get out of the elements, have a beer and laugh. It was totally different than the more family shows at our other stops."

Being a small part of supporting American service members was eye-opening. "The stuff USO does for the men and women in the military is impressive," Bubba says. "Bringing people in to entertain, providing phone cards, Wi-Fi access, computers, having places to get a snack or drink. It's all-encompassing and amazing. I thought I understood that from the outside, but seeing the inner workings is really cool."

"For me, the coolest moments were running into people who listened to our show before they deployed and realizing we were giving them a little bit of home," Big D says. "We got a real sense that what we do in radio is important. Maybe we didn't realize the impact it has until we got over there."

Upon their return to Stateside radio, the show focused on stories from the trip and took calls from listeners who have family at the bases. "All the moms called in," Bubba says. "'OMG, my son or daughter hasn't stopped talking about your show!'"

As might be expected considering the different cultures, the language barrier and jet lag, there were some unexpected moments of levity. "The last night we were kind of punch drunk from doing three shows in three days, and we went to dinner at a ramen restaurant," Thomas says. "The food came out one at a time, and Bubba's came last. When the waitress set his bowl in front of him, he drew a blank on the word 'arigato,' which means 'thank you.' Instead, he looked at her and said, 'Uh, Guantanamo.' She bowed and walked away, but for the remaining time we were in Japan, we were constantly bowing to each other and saying, 'Guantanamo.'"

Video and photos from the trip can be viewed on the *Big D & Bubba* Facebook [here](#).

—Chuck Aly



U.S., Yo: Bubba, Peluso, Thomas, Col. Gage, Sgt. Major Norman, Big D, Aquilino (l-r).