

Hospital ship "Haven" in Nagasaki, Japan

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We arrived in the Pacific more or less at the tail end of the war and as a consequence missed the action incident to the invasion of Iwo Jima and Okinawa although this ship was said to be slated for those operations. However, repeated delays in the ship yards cheated us out of the opportunity. We did bring back to San Francisco one load of over 700 patients including 390 neuropsychiatry patients. There were 24 serious mental cases in the group and some 120 who needed constant supervision. As you can imagine I was very busy on that trip, and all patients were delivered safely. We were glad to make that trip in order to test out our new ship which is something advanced and new in a hospital ship. It is completely air conditioned and possesses the space, facilities and fittings of the best shore establishment. It is a super deluxe affair and hard to visualize without having seen it. My own department has 80 beds including five quiet rooms for seriously ill patients. The ship holds over 800 patients.

At the time of announcement of the end of the war with Japan we were anchored in Pearl Harbor. There was quite a demonstration put on by the ships in the harbor that night with colored flares crisscrossing the sky, searchlight beams everywhere and guns shooting. That event ended a cycle for me for I was in Pearl Harbor on December 7th when the Japs pulled their sneak attack. My ship was anchored at that time very near the same spot, we left the next day for Okinawa and followed the route of our navy's march across the pacific - through the Marshalls, Carolines, Guam and arrived at Okinawa around the middle of August.

I will never forget our arrival off Okinawa, for that was our first sight of the mighty collection of ships, which make up the Pacific Fleet. As we steamed into Buckner Bay, we passed battleship after battleship and carrier after carrier with countless destroyers and cruisers scattered about. It was a fascinating and thrilling experience. It was in this bay and another bay directly across the island that our ships fought off

the kamikazes day after day for months. I later learned from a doctor who had been through it all that our ships were hit at the rate of four a day. Several including a battleship were hit while we were celebrating at pearl Harbor.

I was fortunate enough to get ashore and make a trip around the island of Okinawa a day or so after we arrived. The island is some 60 to 70 miles long and from 5 to 10 miles wide. The landing was made when our troops invaded the island, on the west coast near the southern end. The army attacked to the south and the marines to the north. The landing was virtually unopposed, but the army soon ran into heavy opposition. The terrain consists of rather steep hills throughout the island with rather heavy wooded areas, one hill near Naha is still denuded of vegetation where a week long artillery duel took place - supposed to be the fiercest of the Pacific war. Large piles of empty shell cases may still be seen in this area, on a hill overlooking the landing beach is a navy and marine cemetery containing many crosses. I noticed on many of them the names of naval officers and pharmacist mates. The chief city of Okinawa, Naha, is now nothing but rubble.

Okinawa is a naturally beautiful place with rich soil and heavy vegetation controlled by widespread cultivation, one of the most interesting things to me were the numerous tombs or burial vaults to be seen on every hill side. They are quite large and are constructed to resemble the womb or uterus and I must say the similarity is striking. The native dead are placed inside and on the first anniversary of the individual's death a ceremony takes place in which a "virgin" (woman who has not had children) goes into the tomb and cleans the remaining flesh from the bones, she then places the bones in a large urn which is then placed on the lower of seven steps in the tomb, on each succeeding anniversary the urn is placed on the next highest step until it has rested on the seventh and highest step at which time the soul is considered to have joined the ancestors. After that the bones are discarded. The urns are prized as souvenirs but they are very large and not unusually attractive.

Sniping and land mines are still prevalent on the island or were at the time, so I was glad to get the trip over with. The military government set up by the army and navy seems to be doing

an excellent job of resettling and taking care of the people. They are very tiny and smiling - it is amusing to see a large, fat baby sound asleep strapped to the back of his very small mother while she does her work. I was told that these people are quite different from the other Japanese in their manner and attitude - they are amenable and easily controlled. The inhabitants of Japan are said to look down them as yokels or ignorant rurals.

The day following the surrender ceremony in Tokio Bay, we received word that we were to proceed to Japan to evacuate the newly released prisoners of war. There was considerable speculation as to where we might be sent and as to what we could see. When the order came to proceed to Nagasaki you can imagine our excitement over the prospect of looking over the damage done by one of the two atomic bombs dropped just before the war ended.

We were to be a part of a naval task force designated to accomplish this interesting mission. So when we got under way early one morning we found that we were the center of a tight little formation composed of a heavy cruiser, two destroyers and two destroyer transports, we maintained this formation throughout the trip north to Nagasaki which required a day and a night of steaming at sixteen knots. En route we received the following message from the admiral in command of our task force: "We are entering on an experience that we have looked forward to for many months, and that we will always remember with pride. Govern your conduct toward the Japs so that no action of yours will reflect anything but credit on your country and the U. S. Naval Service. Relations with the conquered populace must be dignified and impersonal. The Japanese are still the same people who launched a treacherous attack upon us and have freely employed torture, murder and bestiality toward our captured comrades, therefore be alert for treachery and take necessary steps for your own security. However, their past brutality does not justify unbecoming conduct on our part. Rather must we govern our actions to accord with those principles of decency which the United States has always espoused. I expect officers and men to maintain a smart military appearance with the complete uniform of the day. All parties ashore will be engaged on official business only and will have an officer in charge. All officers ashore will wear

sidearms. Do not forget that our mission is one of rescue. To that end we must devote every effort."

We were supposed to arrive at Nagasaki the following morning at 0900, but early that morning mines were detected in the area by the destroyers and two were soon exploded near by with gun fire, word was quickly passed on our ship for all personnel to stay clear of officers country which is in the forward part of the ship, and we backed out of the area. We then waited for mine sweepers to come along and clear the area. After waiting for several hours we finally steamed in single file led by a little mine sweep into Nagasaki Bay.

Our first view of Japan was one of many steep hills rising out of the ocean, with vapory clouds hovering around their summits. It was a type of landscape I had never seen before - someone said, "It looks oriental", which about described my own reaction. As we moved nearer we could see that the hills were covered with trees and vegetation clear to the top. Each hill was terraced in the Japanese manner of farming. It was all quite beautiful. Those of us who had cameras had a time of it.

We steamed on into the rather narrow bay past a large sunken Japanese tanker, rounded a sharp bend in the bay and found Nagasaki or its remains, clustered around the end of the bay and extending into the hills on either side. On our way in we passed numerous sampans and small ships moving about the harbor. My attention was arrested by a Jap in uniform rowing a small boat. As we passed he stood at attention in his boat and saluted until we had passed him. I thought later this act was rather symbolic of the amazing and sudden reversal in the Japanese attitude and manner toward us. We were to see it everywhere - it is one of the unpredictable and puzzling facets of their personality structure. We steamed past a shipyard full of large ships and midget submarines in various stages of completion. But everything looked second rate, make-shift, rusty, patched up - you wondered how in the world these people could do what they did in this war. So much is done by hand - very little heavy, labor-saving machinery such as we are accustomed to seeing in our own ship-yards can be seen. Later when I saw every Jap male from boys to old men in uniform, I realized that here was total war effort in every sense

of the words. In fact they did such a thorough job of it, they expended nearly everything they have in the way of resources. From what I have seen I would say that Japan is drained white and is certainly going to have to start from scratch.

We were the first non-Japanese to arrive in Nagasaki and must have been quite a sight filing into their well protected Bay. The cruiser anchored in the Bay while we pulled in to the dock and tied up. While we were moving into the dock, the marines from the cruiser landed and in a matter of minutes had all of the Japs out of the area although many of them had already disappeared and were not to make their appearance until we had been there for several days.

We were quite puzzled to see so little damage in this city which was supposed to have been "obliterated" by the atomic bomb. I saw our skipper at the rail looking on and heard him comment that he was "frankly amazed" at the apparently superficial damage. Few buildings were razed but damage to roofs and windows was widespread and thorough. We were to learn later why we could see so little destruction, for the reason which prevented our being able to see the site of the atomic bomb damage was the very thing which prevented complete destruction of the city of Nagasaki, Japan. The city lies in two valleys, roughly in the shape of a "V" the two arms of which are separated by a mountain. The bay lies roughly along one arm and ends at the apex of the "V". So the damage we saw from our ship was that of concussion and it was interesting to note that the taller buildings suffered the most.

After tying up at the dock, a group went ashore to inspect the adjacent buildings and lay plans for the operation we were sent to carry out. The general plan was to evacuate some 12,000 allied prisoners of war from a number of prisoner of war camps scattered around the island of Kyushu, and transport them by train to Nagasaki where we would immediately process them, separating the sick from the well. The sick were to be treated on board the HAVEN and those physically able were to be evacuated by transports to their home lands, it was soon apparent that we had a good location for the task, for there were several warehouse buildings in fairly good shape along the dock and behind these were railroad tracks complete with loading platform.

Working parties were soon at work cleaning and disinfecting the buildings and readying the place for the first group of prisoners which were expected the next day. A very efficient arrangement was set up whereby the POW'S would leave the train, proceed to the end of the platform where they were questioned by record clerks and necessary information obtained relative to their POW status, while waiting to go through this procedure they were given refreshing food by the Red cross workers. Each man next entered a large enclosure where he removed all of his prison camp clothes then moved on in to a long bath room with many showers. After he had bathed thoroughly, he was dusted with DDT powder and given a physical examination by a group of physicians following which he received a complete outfit of new clothing. If he was found to need medical care he was admitted to the HAVEN. Prisoners who arrived in stretchers were carried to the hospital ship, prisoners able to travel on were next directed to the dock where he received a bag from the Red cross containing toilet articles, while waiting on the dock for a boat to carry him out to the waiting transports in the bay he received more refreshments. Everywhere he looked there were smiles of welcome and our men ready and willing to answer questions and talk to him. Many of them felt the need to talk of their experiences and there were many listeners. Many of them preferred to stand and stare at the gleaming white hospital ship towering above them, then at the American warships in the harbor and our husky marines patrolling the area. They were all happy - very happy.

In the course of the first day's operation minor bottlenecks and delays developed, but these were quickly eliminated and by the end of the day the whole set-up was working smoothly. The next day a band from one of the cruisers was on hand to meet each train with music, we were all extremely proud of the whole arrangement. The trains began arriving every three or four hours each one with several hundred men. Each new arrival was a thrill with the band playing "Hail, Hail the Gang's All Here" and the sailors and marines on the platform cheering. It was an experience to see the somewhat bewildered expressions of the men on the trains change to tears, smiles and laughter as they realized that they had reached the end of the road - that the day, the longing for which had sustained them through months and

years of torture and mistreatment, was at hand. Many of the cars had slogans chalked on them such as "Australia here we come" and the names of ships such as "U.S.S. Houston" and "H.M.S. Exeter". One train brought boxes containing the ashes of the Americans, British and Dutch who had died in the camps.

The day after our ship arrived at Nagasaki, I heard that a tour of the area blasted by the atomic bomb was to be conducted for a group of naval photographers. I borrowed the ship's camera and placed myself in an advantageous position to go along with the party, when transportation for the group arrived, we all climbed into the rather ancient charcoal burning truck along with several Japanese officers wearing their samurai swords who were to be our escort through the area. In a few moments we were approaching the base of the hill on the other side of which the industrial section of the city was located and which was the site of the atomic bomb blast, progressively greater damage was noted as we approached this section and areas as large as a city block were nothing but rubble piles. None of us were prepared for what we saw as we rounded the base of the hill - even in that group of experienced combat photographers everyone was speechless. For what had apparently been an area full of buildings of various kinds covering eight or ten square miles was now a clearing in which even the usual bomb wreckage was not to be seen. The huge steel framework of a mile long string of once great factories along the left of the valley where the Mitsubishi steel and ordinance works had turned out war materials was smashed and twisted to the ground. The shells of only three or four modern buildings were all that was standing in the whole area, one was the Medical school and University Hospital where all the patients, the nurses and the staff of the Medical school perished.

A large prison built of stone and concrete and surrounded by a fifteen foot wall had been located on the top of a hill approximately over which the atomic bomb had exploded. Nothing remained but a ten foot section of the wall. One wondered where the wreckage and debris of the buildings could be. The steel undercarriage of a street car, all that remained, rested on the track at the spot where it happened to be at 1100 on the morning of August 9th. The usual description of the blast by witnesses

mentioned a "blinding flash" followed by a tremendous white cloud of smoke which surged upward into the stratosphere. Those in the immediate vicinity were not conscious of an explosion at the time but stated there was an inconceivable concussion. All the Japanese I saw were impressed tremendously by the fact that the damage before us was the result of one bomb.

The Japanese had reported that the bomb area was still radioactive and therefore still harmful to persons entering the area. This theory was based chiefly on the continuous appearance of new patients at the municipal hospital suffering from radiation effects. A staff medical officer from the task force took along materials to test the radio activity of the soil and metal objects in the area. He gave me two small x-ray films to carry on my person. When examined later these tests were found to be negative. However, at the suggestion of the X-ray officer on board the HAVEN, an overnight test was made of the soles of my shoes. Results were obtained which were thought to be positive and I was urged to not wear the shoes. The other medical officers on board enjoyed ribbing me over the possibility of approaching sterility as a result of my trip. However, more conclusive tests later Confirmed the lack of any radio-activity in the area.

After leaving this scene of desolation, the staff medical officer asked to be taken to the hospital where the bomb victims were being treated. When we arrived at the large Jap hospital, he invited me to go in with him and see what information of interest we could pick up. The windows of the hospital were soon filled with nurses, corps-men and doctors looking curiously down at us as we got down from the truck to enter, we were careful to remove our guns before entering and asked at the front entrance for the medical director of the hospital. He soon appeared and bowed us in. What we saw in that hospital was something I wouldn't have missed seeing for anything but something I never want to see again.

Everywhere you looked there were desperately sick people, mostly women and children. Many were horribly burned and over and around all of them were flies by the millions. There were no beds - all patients were lying on straw mats on the floor. In the corridors of the hospital, the patient's kin had set up their charcoal

burners and were preparing a meal thus filling the hospital with smoke. One sensed that death was hovering over many of these people - while we were examining one recent admission, two died close by.

We asked the medical director many questions concerning the results of the bomb explosion. He stated that something like 30,000 had been killed outright and of all the injured who had been treated at the hospital, 60 to 70% died. Patients were still being admitted at that time, a month after the explosion, complaining of weakness, sick feeling, headache and nausea. When examined, they usually had small petechiae or hemorrhages in the skin and alopecia or hair falling out. Blood examinations showed an aplastic anemia with red blood cell counts of 50,000 in many cases and white cells as low as 500. Examination of the bone marrow on autopsy showed complete loss of activity - no blood cells were being formed. These findings were all the result of the radiation produced by the atomic bomb. It was comparable to a situation in which each individual within a certain large area would receive a tremendous dose of x-ray or radium radiation. It is significant that all delayed admissions to the hospital suffering from the results of this radiation eventually die. The director told us the mortality had been 100%.

Within a few days after the released prisoners of war had started arriving at our processing station, my two wards were filled with sick men, many of them living skeletons. Many people thought that it would be only a matter of "resting them up for a couple of day" and giving them plenty to eat. Those of us working with them, however, soon realized that a great many of them were desperately ill and urgent measures were necessary to save them. Those of the medical profession who have worked with cases of Beri Beri know that this vitamin deficiency disorder can and does cause sudden death. We labored many hours to supply thiamin chloride or vitamin B by every means possible and to bolster a failing heart until the vitamin could do its work.

It was our good fortune that the committee sent out by president Truman to study the atomic bomb explosion arrived in Nagasaki soon after we did. They asked to be quartered on board the Haven and inasmuch as I was in charge of the officer's mess, it was my

duty to look after them. As a result I had many interesting discussions regarding the atomic bomb and its possibilities with the members of the committee several of whom were scientists who had worked with the bomb from the beginning. Of course, they gave out no information except what had been released for publication, still it was a thrill to talk with the men who had done much to work it out.

One of the leading men in the group is a Dr. Warren, a well known X-ray man in the Army Medical corp. He was intimately associated with the development of the bomb and related details. He gave us a lecture one evening in the wardroom of the HAVEN on the development of the atomic bomb. He began his talk by telling of the various places back home that were chosen for the site of the different operations in the development of the bomb. He told of the picking of the men, the problem of security among the workers and families and the troubles arising from this security which was very rigid. He gave a few figures to show the terrific magnitudes they were dealing with in the physics and chemistry of the project. This thing they were working with would occasionally overwhelm the psychic stability of a scientist when he would comprehend the inconceivable forces he was working with and the awful consequences should they get loose. There were many psychic problems. He stated that the theoretical physicists were the heroes of the project - he described them as the long haired individuals who would stand rocking on their heels for hours looking out a window then suddenly say, "Ah ha," and jot down a few figures.

The Colonel pointed out that uranium ore was the chief raw material from which the vital constituents of the bomb were derived - an isotope of uranium called uranium 235 was the element used. New elements never known before were discovered in the research which went into the processing of uranium. They found that tons of radio-active material could be made in the process. The significance of this is apparent when you realize how expensive radium is and its importance to medicine. In fact, if the Germans had won the race for Doomsday, as TIME magazine put it, they could have lined the beaches of Normandy with this radio-active material and prevented any beachhead. They were only a month or so behind us when many of their scientists

were killed in the bombing raid on their research center at Peenemünde on the Baltic sea.

The first experiment with the bomb was described to us. Prior to detonating it, a few tons of T. N. T. were exploded in order to calibrate their instruments and have a comparison. The first atomic bomb was placed on a 100 foot steel tower and arrangements were made for the workers to watch it from specially constructed structures thousands of yards away. When the bomb was detonated, there was a blinding flash and a tremendous column of heated air rose very rapidly to about 40,000 feet. There was a mighty rush of air toward the base of the column which went sweeping upward at tornado speeds. This effect is like a huge vacuum sweeper and it was pointed out that this sweeping effect is what removed a great deal of the debris at Nagasaki. As I mentioned before, it looks like the rubble at Nagasaki had been cleared out by bulldozers, but we learned that it was all sucked up into the stratosphere. The dust and debris column rose 70,000 feet at Nagasaki. The heat produced by the flash was of solar intensity and it seared the country side with infra-red or radiant heat. Many of the victims showed the result of this heat - one side of their face being burned or any exposed part of the body turned toward the flash, wooden telephone poles were burned on one side. A tremendous flash of gamma radiation gave many victims as much as 2000 R - (Roentgen unit) of irradiation. The radiation was equal to tons of radium although the flash was of extremely short duration - one millionth of a second we were told.

The bomb explosion itself was a chain reaction started by splitting a uranium atom with a neutron which in turn gave off more neutrons which split more atoms until about 20% of the uranium atoms in this bomb were split. The explosive element which amounted to about six pounds together with the detonating mechanism was placed in a 500 pound casing and dropped like any other bomb - it exploded at 1800 feet. Recording instruments were dropped at the same time by parachutes. When the bomb explodes it causes terrific waves of force and these waves have synchrony. That is, if the bomb is detonated at just the right height, the waves build up and re-enforce each other until the force they exert is hard to comprehend. Battleships would be stove in by the force or rolled over. The terrific swish or tornado effect of the

rising hot air adds to the rolling over effect of the concussion so that any concentration of ships could be eliminated by two bombs according to this expert. He also stated that this tornado effect fans huge fires. These fires were responsible for the many second degree burns of the victims and not the flash. The radioactive substance in the bomb never gets to the ground but is swished up into the stratosphere by the tornado rise of heated air. Three such clouds are now floating in the stratosphere from the three bombs exploded so far.

We were all greatly impressed by his lecture - you might say we were stunned in a way. It is impossible to comprehend the true significance of this thing to the future of the world. The world is certainly far from ready for this discovery. It may have ended the war for us, but it may some day be turned against us and we would lose the things for which we fought this long bloody war. Our country could be the greatest force for peace and security in the world if it would but accept the responsibility. Even out here few think of anything but getting back and forgetting what they have seen out here. "Let's get home and look after our own affairs - what these people do out here is none of our business", they say. And these are intelligent men - it depresses me. We are still selfish and materialistic, we have learned nothing apparently.