

Nagasaki Diary

It was rather foggy, wet and cold, this September 11th, 1945 when we pulled into Nagasaki, Kyushu, Japan. It was at one time the third largest industrial and shipbuilding center of Japan.

We stopped dead in the water, out of sight of land, waiting for a pilot to take us into the harbor. The reason for the pilot was that our ship was the first U.S. ship larger than a mine sweeper to enter the harbor.

After waiting from the expected time of his arrival - 8 AM - to the actual time of his arrival - 11 AM - we proceeded into the harbor.

In the formation behind us came a Destroyer Transport, a small Seaplane Tender, a Hospital Ship and two Destroyers in that order.

Soon after the pilot - who was a Lieutenant Commander - came aboard we started into Nagasaki and we got our first sight of Kyushu Island. It was hazy as we were looking through the afore-mentioned low clouds and drizzle. This first view showed a rather rugged terrain with sharply clipped edges dropping off into the sea.

As we came nearer we saw how lucky we were that we - the Allies - didn't have to go into Japan by force, as practically every inch of coast line and every rock just off the coast was a Gibraltar and Corregidor combined. With Nagasaki's very narrow harbor entrance, it would have been impossible to go in until months of steady bombarding had been effected.

Soon we could see the entrance to the harbor but that was all, because there was no apparent way to go after entering. Even after we were well inside the entrance and in the Outer Harbor the actual route didn't show itself until we had almost run into a vertical cliff about three times, and got past a vertically edged rock with about 50 yards of clearing on our port side.

We made a sharp left turn into one seemingly blind channel, but it turned out to be the one we were to use.

On the way through the Outer Harbor the main impression on my mind was still the very rugged topography and now the brilliant and beautiful green color of it also. It was just like the travel folders used to picture it before the war. Still, the narrowness of the channel impressed me. It would have been a near miss indeed, had we been forced to pass another ship of any size.

As we continued on our passage up the channel, we saw occasional signs of civilization clinging to the hillsides or the narrow strips of level land along the water's edge. They were rather poor signs though. In fact, they were some of the worst excuses for dwellings I have ever seen.

I think my neck and eyes had more exercise during the trip up the channel than they had had for a long time before, or since. Indeed, I must have looked like I was watching a tennis match.

After what seemed like hours, we entered the Inner Harbor, passing the same type of surroundings as before. Then came the first view of the city of Nagasaki, or what was left of it. It was pretty badly battered and very badly neglected. We passed four Japanese Transports which

were recently launched. They were far enough along to float and that's about all. Then the war ended and construction stopped.

Most of the city along the harbor is built on reclaimed land which housed shipyards, factories and other businesses and a few residential establishments. The accuracy of Allied bombings was shown here in the destruction of businesses only. The "homes" were comparatively unscarred.

We soon had our ship moored both bow and stern to mooring buoys anchored in the channel, and began to really inspect the place, after the ship secured from General Quarters. I remember I spent one whole afternoon looking through a pair of binoculars.

On the shore of the Inner Harbor, in what was designated the first district of Nagasaki itself, there were such things as the aforementioned shipyards, dry docks of destroyer size, I imagine, and about six other good sized industrial plants. Also there were the foreign embassies, docks, railroad station, some of the general business area and some residential districts. The factories were on the left side as we faced the ship's bow, the business buildings were ahead and to our right. The docks and railroad station were a little to our right. The ship was headed about North-North-East in the harbor.

We were at Nagasaki for two weeks. During that time we never turned a screw. However, we were very busy for the first few days. Thereafter things were a little quieter. The reason for being so busy at first is because then all the small boats in the harbor operated under our control. Later they were directed from the beach.

One of the purposes of coming to Nagasaki was to take charge of the evacuation of ex-prisoners of war. They were brought in on the remains of the single track-narrow gauge railroad which was the only one into the city, the first trainload of them arriving about three days after we did. The groups that I saw arrive got there about five and eight days later than we did.

At the depot there was a platform built to the door level of the cars with a roof built over it. It afforded some protection from the weather, though not much. The Flag Band from the ship was stationed on the platform to perform when the time came, and there were about ninety-nine other men from the ship besides myself there to greet them also. The platform looked just like most any in the U.S. While we were waiting, some of the reception party were looking around the small area of the city that was available for "exploration".

At the first audible blast of the whistle in the distance, the reception party and a few others began to gather slowly. As the sound of the whistle drew nearer, more people arrived. When the sound was close, everyone was looking in the direction of same, anxiously waiting for the first glimpse of the engine. That didn't happen until the train was 1,000 yards off or less.

As the train came in sight the band started out with "Hail, Hail the Gang's All Here," "California, Here I Come" and other songs and marches. For a short time all was noise and confusion, between the whistle, band and shouts.

After the train stopped and the noise quieted down, the passengers disembarked and were checked in, as the train quietly backed away.

Then followed a period of general conversing and looking around, and the downing of doughnuts and coffee by the men if they wished, and then they were processed. This consisted of registering, and giving them their first shower in three or more years in most cases, new clothes, toilet articles, and more food. Then the reception party came into effect again. They met and talked with the men and sort of gave them a figurative, if not literal, handshake.

The particular bunch of fellows that I was there to greet were Dutch and Javanese, most of whom were captured on Java and wanted to return.

Some of them were in a jolly sort of a mood, and all of them were happy and thankful, to say the least. However, some were still in a fog and were still too deeply stamped by their experiences, both inwardly and outwardly. As a rule, though, they were in pretty good condition. Everyone I talked to said how glad they were to see American planes dropping them supplies in camp during the last few weeks they were imprisoned.

I did see about seven fellows later, though, who were from the Hospital ship that came with us that were, to be frank, in pathetic condition. I'll let it rest there with the following: remember the picture of the thinnest prisoner you ever saw, and the comparison to some of them is perfect.

While there, we were taken on a tour of Nagasaki via Army Truck. While on this tour, we passed through an area eight miles, about, in both directions, and which was more devastated and destroyed than anything I've ever seen or heard of. In case you haven't already guessed, it was the area affected by the second Atomic Bomb of World War II.

For 500 yards, at least, in every direction from where the bomb "arrived" there was nothing. Literally, it was the "city that wasn't there." It consisted of nothing but finely ground rubble. Not even the trolley poles of the streetcar line which passed through it were completely spared. For four miles each way the buildings were badly damaged or almost totally destroyed. The once proud steel Mitsubishi Torpedo Factory was a mere mass of twisted contorted beams and girders. No walls survived. The concrete buildings held up fairly well, with only shock and pressure inflicting the most damage. However, anything constructed of steel or iron was in an indescribable condition.

The bomb didn't leave any crater, as it exploded from 700 to 1,000 feet up. When it did, flame of every color of the rainbow supposedly flashed from it, destroying everything it came in contact with.

The work with the prisoners continued for about a week and a half, with around 1,000 a day arriving, about 300 to 400 per train. The next time I went on a reception party, nothing happened. The 8:00 AM train arrived at 12:30 PM. By that time I had returned to the ship.

After we took a four day "side trip" to Sasebo, the one-time naval base north of here, I again went ashore. This time, though, I went to a midget sub base, a fair

distance from the main part of the city. It was a large establishment with many subs in various stages of completion, and some ten finished models with some sea duty to their credit. The hatch through which you had to go to get into them was 12 to 14 inches at the most in diameter. What a job it would have been to get inside one.

Floating in the harbor was one of the largest cranes I've ever seen of any variety. I assume it was to put the subs in the water, and take them out.

Tied alongside the crane was a Japanese tug of about the ocean-going size. We made this our next stop on our tour. I noticed it had extremely narrow ladders in and on it, as did the crane. Also it had low doors and ceilings and, when my memory of their existence failed, it sometimes led to a very discouraging bump. It always seemed that the wood, or whatever I hit, was harder than my head, and that the latter always ended up second best.

Shortly following that, an entry in the ship's log read "0700, Underway and standing out." Yes, we were leaving Nagasaki and going to Sasebo again. At any rate, the U.S.S. Wichita, Heavy Cruiser 45, was leaving Nagasaki. The date was October 6, 1945.

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