

The camp that gave us a little more hope at the beginning started to lose its shine somewhat. Actually it was a rather dull affair. The barracks were tarred black the roof was grey, every building the same and the paths and road also blackish grey. Stone from the mine was used for pavement and road cover. In fact the entire environment was blackish and dull. The Japanese have a particularly uninviting electrical network; all above ground, with somewhat heavy cables and many transformers on the way, high up on the black poles. Every so many poles a cable comes up to keep the voltage right I suppose and the result is: poles poles everywhere.

All this added to the misery of work and nothing but work and very hard work at that and then there was a rather ominous development. Suddenly we saw that in our and everybody else's absence the parade ground in the camp which was square was adorned in each corner with a pillbox, with the openings for the guns inward, covering every bit of the area. The message seemed clear: when the Americans land you will all be shot. Which indeed was the case: Our American commander was shown by the Japanese Camp commander at the end of the war a sealed envelope which he had to open for orders on receipt of a special code word from Tokyo.

There was another very remarkable aspect to life in this camp, which had existed for a long time prior to our arrival and was previously for American POWs, and to which we were a recent addition, to be followed by English and Australian prisoners. There was a large, newish mess hall that had been built in which the American contingent practiced an activity unique to them – they traded in food futures.

Once the food had been distributed – usually a bowl of soup and some rice – an American would offer his soup today for another's soup tomorrow, or rice today for someone else's rice at some future time. The trade was quite lively and I participated only once because my soup was lousy, but had the misfortune of losing my investment because my deal partner could not repay me; he'd traded himself in such a complex position that he was effectively bankrupt.

This was taken as a serious breach and an officer became involved because the insolvent should not suffer from hunger oedema. I then had to formally waive his soup debt to me, which I did and which he much appreciated, referring to me as 'that swell Dutchie', a pleasant enough streetwise American that could well have been a homeless in his native country, but for the fact that he was a professional soldier. The mess hall was in near constant use because of the various shifts changing as well as those not working shift.

The rice we ate was served from a huge vat by a cook with a bamboo bowl that came in three sizes, each marked according to size with one, two, or three stripes. That gave rise to talk of it being a 'two striper' day or a 'three striper' day, but this guaranteed nothing because the cook used a spatula to fill the bowl, and a little extra compression would put a three-stripe helping into a two-stripe bowl.

In our imagination at least the cook would see his pal approaching and give the bowl an extra pat or two to give him additional food. Hence once we had passed the rice point we'd stand there comparing our miniscule servings. There was also an officer on hand to ensure fairness. Whether it was to be a one, two, or three stripe day was determined by how much rice the Japanese had issued on that day.

Winter approached and, as in many harrowing times, one finds lighter moments. Our clothing was utterly unsuited to a Japanese winter, which can be very cold indeed. Before the war with

the Japanese England hastily sent troops to defend Singapore and Malacca (Malacca is now part of Malaysia), and the Quartermaster General insisted on issuing heavy winter coats to this contingent despite protests that they were going to the tropics. Regulation x and y from the rulebook may have been quoted. That is how a shipload of winter coats arrived in the East that the Japanese had no use for since they were far too big for any Jap alive. And that's how we all acquired heavy winter coats, which were of limited use since the temperature underground hardly varied, and on the surface we mostly slept; but for the trip between the two they were ideal, with deep, warm pockets for your hands.

That reminds me. One very early morning, still night actually, we march from the galley [as the Americans called the eating hall] and past the guardhouse. A Jap spots me with my hands in my pockets and takes me out of the marching column. It is winter and the water in the fire hose reservoir, each barracks had one, was frozen. He takes his bayonet and cuts loose the ice cover and I must stand there still, with the ice in my hands until the group later is ready to leave for the mine.

This is a typical way Japanese issued their punishments. A man who, in their judgement, had not raised his arm correctly or sufficiently when saluting, was told to fetch a bucket of water; which he would do, a full bucket and bring it to the guard house. "No No not so full" just a little water and the guard would throw the excess out. Give the bucket back and say, "Much water much heavy!!" And then tell the poor man to lift the bucket up high on stretched arms and keep it that way for an hour or so. Any slacking, which is unavoidable, is punished with a not even hard but very painful hit with a stick on your kneecap, exactly there where it hurts real good, or on the shins.

But deeper in wintertime there were the first signs of things not going too well for the Japs. A long, open shelter was dug and even occasionally there was the apparent reason for us to go in there, in other words of some action getting closer to Japan. At a little distance across a sort of monument was built, in the form of a pyramid but hollow and inside were rows of planks on which were placed little coffins of those who had died. Like in our first camp these places had to be treated with respect and one had to salute when passing the place.' The dead were cremated and for that purpose brought to a special place, with the little coffin on a small cart. It was outside Omuta in a suddenly hilly surrounding with pine trees. There were a number of buildings and once I was appointed to push that cart. Who was inside I had no idea.

Such a task was considered an outing and you did not think any further. Japanese coffins, made of ordinary pine were small. I was told - never witnessed it - that when somebody died it was necessary to quickly fold him in that small coffin; before rigor mortis set in as otherwise there was a problem. The horn blower sounded the particular national signal each time a fellow prisoner passed away. I cannot remember that this happened in Thailand. One never forgets the tune however. Sometimes it is played on a TV report in case of a famous person's funeral and the tune still sticks.

And then One day it was Christmas and it really fell upon you, at least that was with me the case. But how did you know: You had not the vaguest idea of dates? Well this time there was an aid: The Japanese, not the army but Mitsui went to the expense to paste on every barrack door a paper Christmas tree; now was that not nice. However we did work on that day, and after Christmas and New Year we did not have that feeling we now often have: Hey Hey those mixed up days are over we are back to normal! Things carried on. But slowly one noticed the hardship also among the population increasing. Sometimes when we left the mine in the dark at the end of a shift, and walked to the barracks amongst the coal heaps suddenly great numbers of people, dark figures were seen rushing away from coal dumps. Obviously stealing was going

on; coal required for their manner of heating a place with a bucket-like container with burning coal in side. This gave an enormous stink because the coal we dug must have been very young so to speak. Very smoky and tar producing.

In the mine where the coal layer stopped and the stone began there was a thin layer of black glasslike stuff, the ceiling shone with it and the floor smooth, which made the digging of coal easier once you had dug a hole down to reach the floor. Now in that glassy layer were many so called blackheads, as if at the time of formation there had been a pool of moisture like stuff which had solidified. These things were very dangerous when they became bare, hanging in the ceiling after the coal had been dug away, and were hacked out immediately. When the thing fell on the floor it broke into hundreds of pieces like something ceramic; and the bits shimmered like glass.

And one day that winter I am on Saitan and drilling, which went fast always, the coal being soft. Now the jakkuhama had a special lever which if pushed down caused the thing to strongly blow at its drill end. The long drill, from end to end had a small pipe drilled through from beginning to the drill head. The purpose of all this was that while drilling a lot of coal dust was created at the drilling end; By pushing the lever air was blasted right through the drill bit and the coal dust blown out: of course into your face No amount of washing could wash away the coal dust from your eye lids, Saitan workers looked much like women in shows some times with heavily made up eyelids.. But what I actually want to tell is that while drilling that day all went smooth until suddenly no father; the neighbour jackhammer the same. You must try to [you cannot] imagine the noise of three of these air drills working at the same time in your passage at home the noise is really horrific. None of these Japanese seemed at all concerned and we stopped work and off we went.

This did not happen every day such a break. But next day we come back and see what this was all about. We had reached an earth crack in the crust. All of a sudden no more coal but granite and the coal continued low nearly on ground level. The granite wall now laid bare was strongly leaning forward. And where the two separated granite chunks of earth crust touched, in other words at the crack, there was not a clear slash or cut. The large crack was a conduit for water; it was all wet and filled with rough little stone not dust. The two large chunks of earth crust had moved through the eons and the result was a separation caused by that movement which created an about one centimetre thick layer of rough grit.

The next shift had the problem of squeezing the 'troffo' and chain and all else through the about two foot split and for the motor a hole had to be blasted, and that was the task of the preparation shift. Possibly you'll ask: Why does ha harp on about such a little thing? I found it fascinating to think about how what we think of as solid ground that we walk on and build on is full of such fissures, that I could easily insert my finger into.

Also, there was no further sign of the grey rock, now it was all white and of a quite different formation to that which we'd blasted out every day until then. And that glass-like layer above and below the coal seam, how was that created?

During the digging out of coal during 'Saitan' nobody bothered to separate real coal from the embedded stone and rock: it was all shovelled into 'troffo' equally with a shovel somewhat larger than a garden shovel – the objective being to fill the trolley (although there were limits to what you could get away with). As a measure of how the Japanese practiced conservation of resources it was interesting to see how they separated and burnt even the grey rock and the glassy intrusions – not illogical since this must have contained at least some coal dust.

A sought after job on the mine was tending to the furnaces. These took in everything mined that was not pure coal through an aperture at top, which was the only opening other than small holes in the metre and a half diameter for agitating the contents with an inserted rod. The product of these furnaces was heavy, black oil through heat so intense that it brought on a recurrence of malaria – not a bad thing in itself as it bought a few days of sick leave. Everyone who worked these furnaces came down with something – which made them a popular place to work – anything to get away from the horror underground.

And then a really special output day was announced: 3 times our normal production. This must have been in the later part of the winter [my guess]. In the place where the workgroups were formed we were a Dutch/American mixture; unusually large in number, I think about 8 or 9 and the total number of coal trucks, those you filled down below [karretjes we said] was 116. I remember that for a special reason which is part of this story, considering that each took 2 tons or a little more that was a lot of coal to be dug.

We went to a part of the mine where I had not been before. The quantity required meant 3 times drilling and three times blasting and three times digging. That lasted about 13 hours, and then what? 2 karretjes short! And for one or other reason these 2 had to be produced; there appeared to be some holy duty. This is where I remember the total of 116 from.

For those last two no drilling and blasting were to take place; instead we were to hack it off with picks. These mine picks are much lighter than say garden picks. Do not have the T shape but an L, formed by a rather light slightly hook--form extension wherewith it is possible to break off the coal face fairly large pieces if you apply force. Nou ja that is what had to be done. A few of us were put to that and one of them was an American who like all the others was dead tired.

What he was able to produce was but little. This angered a Japanese foreman so much that he jumped forward –easy he was fresh, had done nothing--, and kicked this poor American with great force so that he was sort of flung aside and the Jap started hacking away to show how good he was. However things then went a little fast, too fast to follow, but my impression is that the American sort of half falling half still on his legs ran and hit the floor at a little distance away; the Jap hit the coal face once or twice and then out of the ceiling dropped a block some 2 meters by 1 and a half and 30 cm thick right horizontally on the noisy Jap. Crushed him; he splattered and I on a distance felt myself covered with filth. Just imagination: I had nothing; but boy when one sees this right in front of you and hear all the bones in the man's body crack! The American just sat there for a moment digesting this, not quite comprehending.

We were immediately taken out and up, as soon as the mine could get a cable train down. Even the tools were just heaped against the; miharri' wall. We had to follow the normal rigmarole routine and 'behold' notwithstanding our lateness [114 'karretjes'] the water in the bath was hot. Well then back to the mine house where we made ready to go 'home' and stood in line outside to wait for a Japanese soldier to fetch us. Then out of the entrance building to the mine. From the cable train comes a very small Jap group and two with a stretcher, on it something covered under a white cloth.

The group passes in front of us The Japanese foreman who is with us says, "Nippon mei skoshi bioki" Which means 'A Japanese who is a little unwell'. I was standing in the front rank of our waiting team and behind me an American says : Skoshi bioki my foot [that is what he said while one would expect an expression of disagreement by using the name of a body part a little higher up] the sonofabitch is as flat as a pancake! I took great pains not to laugh as that would have solicited the most violent reaction from our Jap lord and master. That was the poor fellow from under that enormous rock. And I did not know who the American whose life was thus

saved was? He stood in that line too!! There was no celebration, no congratulations to this stranger and I cannot remember any sort special goings on amongst the Americans.

Looking back I ask myself what sort of people we had become who accepted all this as normal day to day occurrences. And had no feeling for their fellow prisoners' lucky escape? Apparently not, though the accident was talked about, that I remember. Who was the Jap? No, that was not even asked. I wonder what would happen under the circumstances of today.

What was really of more concern was the inactivity in the air. Hardly ever –at least in our area-- was there an air raid alarm, lights stayed on, the only thing different was that the food became gradually less.: A very large air raid shelter was being built, this time one that was covered over with heavy timbers. That is true; it made us think that possibly more difficult times lay ahead; For one thing nobody expected that we would spend time in that dug-out when actually the shift was at work and output could not suffer!

Summer began and the climate was clearly our timekeeper. What we did not know was that the Americans had landed on Okinawa, a not very large island but ranking as very important in the defence of Japan and of great importance to the US, apparently the only island suitable for large scale air attacks on Japan Very early in June the Japanese withdrew from neighbouring islands to Okinawa and it took the Americans 83 days to capture it. The US military lost 12,000 men and 110,000 Japanese lost their lives.

That figure is so high because nearly to the end they refused to surrender. This was the first battle where some Japanese were taken prisoner. They hid in cave bunkers which were being burnt out. The Japanese inside did not die a fiery death but through lack of oxygen I think The commander Mitsuri Ushijama emerged from his cave on the 21 June and committed harakiri in front of his troops who surrendered. The American marines – I think 50,000 - landed on Okinawa in April. Of all this we did not know. And from then on the island was transferred into one huge number of airfields. New techniques permitted the building and lay out in a matter of a week.

And soon all hell broke out over our heads. What was relative inactivity for a long time became a daily night bombardment in the new form of carpet-bombing. To be at the receiving end of such an operation is an experience difficult to describe, but it was exceedingly effective in Japan where large city areas burn to cinders because every dwelling is made of wood, inclusive of all electricity poles. A carpet bombed place looked the same as the famous photos of Hiroshima or Nagasaki those photos are more intended to be scary.

A bombed city, for that matter any of these Japanese bombed cities, looked the same: Square patches of roads around flat ground with roof tiles scattered on it mostly broken and corner stones. The wooden house is gone, burnt out completely. It is easy to count the number of houses that had disappeared: count the number of upstanding little water pipes with a tap on. Each house had only one tap: nothing like the German bombed places. Not much rubble on the roads either. And thousands upon thousands must have lost their lives burnt to death or suffocated!

We suffered too, in an idiotic manner but worth telling. One day in that period we come 'home' from the morning shift; it is about 4 o'clock or a little later. The Japanese authorities must have started feeling a little uneasy [or some of them anyway] and distributed out of red cross parcels [they had received one parcel for every four men every week] broken pieces of chocolate and ours were left for distribution with the camp Sergeant-Major Bennet who had decided we should get ours next day, it being too late now. And what happened: that night again carpet bombing –

also our camp was partly hit, and soon we sort of coughed our lungs out from the smoke of half our camp which was on fire AND the place where our chocolates were kept.

Then shortly thereafter, down in the mine I accidentally drop on my foot a large support piece of timber. Nothing serious but my right foot big toe was a bit crushed. That must have been 1st or 2nd August because on the 9th Nagasaki bomb fell and I saw it for the reason that I had light duty on top of the mine; my toe had started to fester and the stench was so strong that at night I stuck my foot out from under the blanket cover. Why? Because all of us developed the remarkable habit of sleeping with the blanket pulled over the head and my toe stink sort of built up under the blanket. Eventually I got light duty and that was 8th August. [1945] Also the following day When IT happened.

The first reaction is to ask and what was it like? It must have been really something! No, actually not. In the first place nobody had ever heard of an atom bomb, nobody knew that something like that would be dropped. Like in a thunderstorm which you view from the safety of your veranda: All of a sudden there is a direct hit in your garden! It goes fast However, the cloud, like on the photos, rising and rising and billowing impressed all That cloud was immense, awesome; and I remember an American saying gee I saw the same thing a couple of days ago over there and that must have been Hiroshima. Where we were it was some 20km from Nagasaki on the other side of the bay, between Omuta and Nagasaki. That cloud was the subject of much speculation, but few thought about a bomb: What sort of a bomb, in our experience, could produce such an enormous cloud?

It must be understood that only one thing was for us really worth bothering about and that was survival. And own wellbeing as far as possible. That I heard something I cannot say; on a mine there is much noise; or perhaps because there is a bit of a ridge between Nagasaki City and the bay to the east of it. And there is with me a vague remembering of a flash. Would that be from remembered hearsay or actually seeing something, but the cloud rose quickly and was awesome, swirling and greyish darkish. The only thing most of us thought it was: a volcanic outburst but there had been no tremors, no nothing! And next day K.C. went back to his normal miner's job. However from now on unbeknown and unexpected changes of fate would be dramatic: so dramatic that they were difficult to believe.

The first very noticeable thing was that nobody could care two hoots about what we did; as long as we kept moving somewhat and amongst the Japs there was something that bothered them but the cause? We could not tell, though we were very clearly not the cause. This went on for how long? I do not remember, except that it was a very short while. And then [I am in the afternoon shift] we sit ready waiting for the cable train to come up again from its first trip down and take us down too. . That was in the opening of the tunnel, looking down into the dark and up is daylight through the tunnel entrance.

And up there I see, most unusually, a Jap soldier running down to us [never seen a military on mine property] and he shouts something, a long story to the mine foremen. We must get up and go back, return our lamps and wait for the first section of our shift, which are already down and spread all over, down below to their working places. Eventually they are there and we wait some more for the morning shift who must stop work immediately. All this is to us of far more importance than that most remarkable cloud we had seen in the direction of Nagasaki, flash or no flash, a few days ago. There were the doubters who say: No this means nothing else than that somebody is missing probably fell asleep somewhere in the mine. But then when we march 'home' we pass Koreans [workers in Japan] on my right hand side and I hear them say to each other: The war is over! And I say to chap next to me, "Did you hear what he said?", but he didn't believe it. That must have been around the 12th. And the last we ever saw of the mine.

Only then it started to filter through that something most out of the ordinary had happened some 20 KM from us a few days ago, but what that was: No idea and not that we cared all that much either. In fact I could not care two hoots, because something awful had popped up. A little while earlier all of us received what looked like an inoculation. And I reacted positive as you should with smallpox. And then our doctor told us "No that was a tuberculosis test", and the whole camp reacted positive: We all had it! In fact he at that time did not think that any of us would make it unless the war ended very soon.

At that time a Japanese doctor was also present; what he did I do not remember exactly but he worked with lists and names and also participated in the inspection. Coming to me it struck me that I was not a number but he called us by name. Now van der Molen is a difficult name, never mind the 'van der' The Japanese do not have the letter 'L' and cannot pronounce a multi-syllable word not ending in a vowel: So my name became MORENA. Normally in the mine I was 864. The Japanese cannot wish even their dearest relative "een lang leuk leven" or 'gelukkig leven'. For them the sound [ours] of an L comes near to the R which they can say very well, better than an Englishman. Whether this is a hard and fast rule I am not so sure. One two three is: Itsi, Ni and then San ending in a consonant. It is also far and dim in my memory that much earlier there was some Red Cross investigation, WHAT is inside the camp and what NATIONALITY. And their names, home addresses, and health situation.

I am writing this , not paying full attention, during March 2003 shortly after Mam passed away and totally forget that well before those tuberculosis tests it happened a number of times that I collapsed while standing on parade, and apparently remained unconscious or semi for a while Eventually I was taken up in the hospital. What was wrong I was not told but the general TB was treated with secrecy. And that must have been the reason. I was there for some time; how could I forget and it was during the late winter time.. Oh yes and something really funny happened in that place.

All of a sudden a Jap comes in and arranges our blankets neatly and we must sit up. And next: in comes another Jap with his arms loaded with plates of food and servers, A bit like Bumstead of the cartoon when he leaves the refrigerator where he helped himself to a snack. We all get a plate of food in front of us and in comes an officer, and on the other side a photographer, they snap a picture and the last one in the row of people charging through the hospital is another Jap who quickly gathers all the food plates. That went so fast that nobody could even dip his finger into what was on the plate. My stay in that hospital was not long and this episode took place well before my crushed toe experience; let this toe business not sound too serious.

Back now to the regular story. We were never told officially by the Japanese that the war was over. It must have been the 15th more likely the 16th that we all had to gather on the parade ground. There were far fewer than before because the burnt out section had moved out. A large table was brought up and the Jap commander climbed on to announce an order issued by the Emperor: There would be 14 days set aside that we would not work and we had to spend the time thinking and remembering our deceased comrades. And that was it. There were still those who did not believe the war was over. That same day painters painted on the roof of the 'galley' a large PW reaching from the top edge down to the gutter, in white, clearly visible against the red tiles of that particular roof, and on either side of the roof.[these painters must have learnt the ease of our letters compared to theirs]

And the next amazing thing that happened was a few days later: a B23 came over very low and on approaching our camp opened its bomb doors and out came a wooden rack on which masses of great parcels dropped out all attached to parachutes in all sorts of colours which

landed in our camp. In the parcels everything one could think of: Coffee milk powder, sausage bread, soup chocolate and whatever. And then we saw too that other planes dropped similar loads all over Omuta. Totally unbeknown there were a great number of camps quite near us, including a Chinese camp: those poor fellows had been there for 8 years.

And not too long thereafter another plane load. Now with the first drop one great parcel had come loose, the parachute fluttered down and the package dropped on the parade ground. However, all that had, been attached to a metal ring which came down on its own and landed on the foot of an American inmate hurting him badly; so badly that he died because of a blood infection I heard this but did not see it, remembered thinking: so close to going home and never made it for such a silly accident. His infection was brought about by the type of coal dust like cover of the parade ground. This tragedy made a deep impression on me so that with the next drop I tried to stay well out of the path the plane took.

And that was under the roof of that same eating hall. And lots of fellows stood there for shelter. Well there comes the plane real low, out comes the wooden rack and all the beautiful coloured parachutes and one big drum-like package breaks loose, the parachute flutters; And then it is most remarkable how the human mind works Suddenly I remember the lesson of our pre-war sergeant-major, who taught us: "Now when you are out in the field for instance and enemy planes drop bombs you must have the strength of will to look up at the bomb being dropped. If it moves stay where you are because it will fall next to you, if it does not move and only gets bigger boy then you move and fast because it's coming straight at you."

Like a flash this goes through my head. And I see this big drum like thing and indeed it gets bigger and I panic like never before because only yesterday that poor American died just before he could go home, also because of a falling object. Fear grips me and I set off at speed and hear my fellows shout come back, but there is no way back and the drum looking up is now real big. The words cannot describe the scare [soldier's language of course can with ease]. And then Wham in the soil next to the walkway a thud and there rests the drum. I should have stayed where I was but no harm was done. Later it occurred to me that the war started the way it ended for me. Something fell close but missed me, like in Tandjong Perak the Surabaya harbour. In the drum there was butter in boxes and pea soup in bags. Or something that looked like pea soup powder.

Then the next thing that happens is that the camp door opens to a group of military. I just happened to be around., Military in all sorts of uniforms and in a manner of grouping that nobody knows but Americans; Evidently the boss or highest in rank in the middle and on either side 3 others and at a certain measured distance and behind another row of again 7, all officers and another row of 7, so 21 in all, They walk, march like, and come in, in formation. There were most of them American officers but also Australian British and Dutch.

They sort of disbanded and invited all their own nationals to listen to what they had to say: Which was that of course Japan had surrendered before there was even one Allied soldier on Japanese ground, consequently the first obvious priority was to remedy that situation as quickly as possible; that we were free to go anywhere we liked in the meantime, and would be fed from the air as we were already.

But one very important point: that our names were all being taken and processed, what is more our next of kin were being advised as soon as possible that we were still around. That was of course important and I personally asked the Dutch officer would that be soon and how did they know the addresses. That was all in hand and all that information would be transmitted by wire, soonest. But postal facilities for us from Japan were not available considering the state of



affairs in Japan. Well that was of course a big thing that soonest our relatives would know and all from records available!

So I thought they will hear first which is good because I have no idea of what happened on the other side and then they know at least I am still alive. No mail could be sent abroad either as long as we were in Japan but we would be taken out as soon as possible, to where ever most suitable, likely Manila. And we were given a picture of what had happened in Europe and elsewhere.

That was the first direct information that we got, actually all organised in a short time. It was still August if I am not mistaken. That picture of the 'outside' was grim and many, particularly those fellows with their roots in Indonesia, started asking themselves are they, on the other side, still there? But news about Europe was also bad. Slowly the realisation that "outside' was and is the real world took hold. I had lived in a very small world of my own; I remember that that occurred to me somewhat as a realisation: The life we have lived was only a small circle but to get out of that? Here I am in Japan in Omuta. A lot of things must happen. To get out of Japan is not in my hand: we will be taken out for sure, but what then? Just to listen to this officer made your mouth fall open. Not only me but the whole world is in chaos. What is more in very serious chaos!

However there was plenty time to go out and see what Japan was really like. But can you believe it: the first time just to walk out through the gates of the camp? Not difficult but it took some saying to yourself: this is now allowed. But officers said rather do not go to Nagasaki: the population may not be all that friendly! Significantly nobody ever said anything, not a word about radiation. So I saw quite a bit of Omuta and travelled by train, evidently running normally in our eyes though possibly fewer trains than in the past.

This is where that incident took place where an American POW ordered an officer off his seat to make place for an old Japanese lady; of which I told earlier. I saw Japanese gardens very evidently not at their best, and learned to avoid Japanese food at their eating places. And that is worth mentioning: The experience to have to pay for food. Because for all those years whatever we ate and however little it was sometime or usually: there was nothing to pay. Not that we needed to buy food. Everybody, but really everybody walked about with a stomach in distress, sometimes great distress, as we were totally not used to the normal food out of the American bombers. That was not just a stomach in distress after a meal. To put it crudely but correct: We walked in the stench of your own burps. And the tension on your abdomen was painful, but to stop eating and give it a rest? No! We were eater fanatics.

All this took many days as it was only by the 25th September that we were taken away. One of our wandering days it occurred to us to visit the place where our dead mates had been cremated, a little outside Omuta. Now I tell all this on purpose without any reference to that mighty bomb that had exploded not far from us for the reason that we did not give it any thought because nobody had the faintest idea of its existence.

The most concrete information we had heard was from the Japanese camp commander who told the story that the Americans had let down a big bomb on a parachute. Now that looked an unlikely story and we had heard so much by way of unlikely stories such as the period that we would not work and had to think deeply about the dead that this parachute bomb was disbelieved as well. And then we come to that place where we took our dead mates: Half destroyed and burnt but the rest intact. However the different rooms all filled to capacity with people bandaged from head to toe, we'd never seen the like; and not just bandaged but thick so that any movement was impossible! What is this?

Well I walked on and remember distinctly that one of the men, a Hollander I knew, said to me, "How can you just walk on don't you see this! Damn you, you are really hard and uncaring!" We had an argument and I said: do you not know any more what these bastards have done to me and to you for that matter, for all those years. There was nearly a fight but I walked on; could really not care. Only much later when we heard and read about the atom bomb did I realise that all those people were severely burnt from the Nagasaki disaster. That was the first evidence that I saw, without knowing.

But then comes the day the really first date I remember: the 25th September: We are told to get ready for the train journey: We are leaving. Well if ever we moved fast it was then A walk to the station where a train stood ready and off we went, You know the story so far, for the last page or so, is slow nothing really happened. But all of a sudden all is action filled. I remember we sat very spacious first class the train went around the bay and stopped in Fukuoka where the Japanese, all sergeant or higher of rank offered us tea. The station was completely undamaged and so most of the railway. This tea offer was: by order of the Americans to imprint in the Japanese minds: you have lost the war and are not the master race!

But then the big thing, the topography of the country was not known in detail but we understood we were going to Nagasaki, Coming closer to the harbour area and the big warehouses the damage was horrific but totally different from what anybody had ever seen. Ghostly in its enormity, the big harbour warehouses normally as everywhere built of heavy steel, not only flattened to the earth but also bent in all sorts of grotesque forms. One heavy steel beam I remember was curled right around in a small curve and all looked as if a giant foot had trodden all down and then stamped it. Remarkably a number of smoke stacks stood upright as if nothing had happened, only a few broken into two The train had slowed down and there seemed no end to this broken, bent, dountrodden steel sheds and warehouses, And then the train stopped in the Nagasaki station. We were all sort of bewildered not fully comprehending. I noticed that half of the station roof cover was gone.

In any case we get out in the roofless area and a non-com commences to line us up and commands "Number!" And then an American sort of ambles up, his unmilitary gait was striking. He smoked a cigar, stuck between his cheek and teeth, says 'what you're doing feller' and our non-com explains he is counting his men. No says the American no need to: these guys are going home; they will all be there. Going the other way then you watch the bastards.

That was my first encounter with a new type of military logic. Then we move on, and that proved to be something new as well: "move on' and at the end of the platform is a band striking up and there are flags all over. What is more there is a very large table loaded with bread buns with all sorts of goodies hanging out; so I say to my fellow next to me on the platform 'there must be some American festivity going on here'. Until it penetrates that all this was to welcome us and celebrate: A red cross lady said to me; pointing at the buns 'take one' And then I said and did nothing, just went on looking stupid and then this red cross lady must have thought: these are Hollanders: he does not understand me and she repeated Nehmen Sie eine. I must have said something like: is that for me? And with tears in her eyes she says of course it is! All this is to celebrate your going home!

Move on, keep it moving are American expressions. I saw sergeants at road repairs saying nothing else all the time to people moving at speed already. So we move on to the next table, and on it are cold tins with drinks; I take a chocolate-like drink but halfway the tin the stomach locks: No more. Sit for a while and 'Move on fellows' and we do, come to a warehouse, split in two in to middle lengthwise, and must enter the left side: Take the clothes of and what you must or want to keep put in the bag we irradiate it [whatever that was; never heard of before] and there we stand,

no, move in Adam style; doctors look at skin disease, get deloused and then come to an area full of continuously running showers, get a piece [the same small pieces you still get today] of Lux soap, Shu that smelt good and at the end of the shower part, small towels are issued.

And there we stand at the end of the shed, can only move to the right: and more surprises: The same length of the building, but in reverse as it were, a great number of little shop-like box spaces with a counter. Keep it moving, and at the first counter I get two pairs of underpants, next one two vests, you know the green army issue [as the Americans say G.I issue], and this goes on until we are fully dressed. At the last stand if I recall we received one set of boots, shu and what kind of boots! True fit too!!

And then we are at the end fully dressed in uniforms THAT FIT; and there is an American Red Cross lady issuing in little blue bags a razor and that sort of things. And now comes a questionable streak in my outlook on life; The last man we see is an American navy officer who motions us on: Keep going fellows until you see a light cruiser by the name of the Houston and go on board.

I was walking with a Dutch Marine who I knew because he slept in my barracks on the mine and belonged to my section No. 15 (dai ju go shotai), a pleasant enough chap though after years of being locked up with professional military I'd about had enough of them. He says to me: "Now Keesie I'll show a landlubber like you what a light cruiser looks like.

My first reaction was "Oh shit, here we go again!". As we walk down the quay we pass a submarine and I ask him "What is that?" He says "That is now a submarine", "Oh, I thought it was a rowboat!" He says: "There in the distance, that's a heavy battleship" I say, "Well I never!", but I hold him back and say: "A battleship you say? Let me tell you that is now a light cruiser" (I'd read the name of the ship painted in grey). It gave me great pleasure to put this bozo in his place – not nice of me, but there you go, I enjoyed it.

We boarded and passed a line of women Marines, the equivalent of MARVA that Mam joined after the war, with typewriters where you gave your details so they'd know who they had on board. We entered the bowels of the ship which had no passenger decks or any place from which you could see the outside world, and we sailed shortly after boarding, now really free for the first time and heading for an unknown future.

Many of us were probably contemplating a future in Dutch Indonesia, but I don't think I was one of those. I was, however, thinking about Hilversum and whether Ina would still be there – that would be the first thing to establish.

END