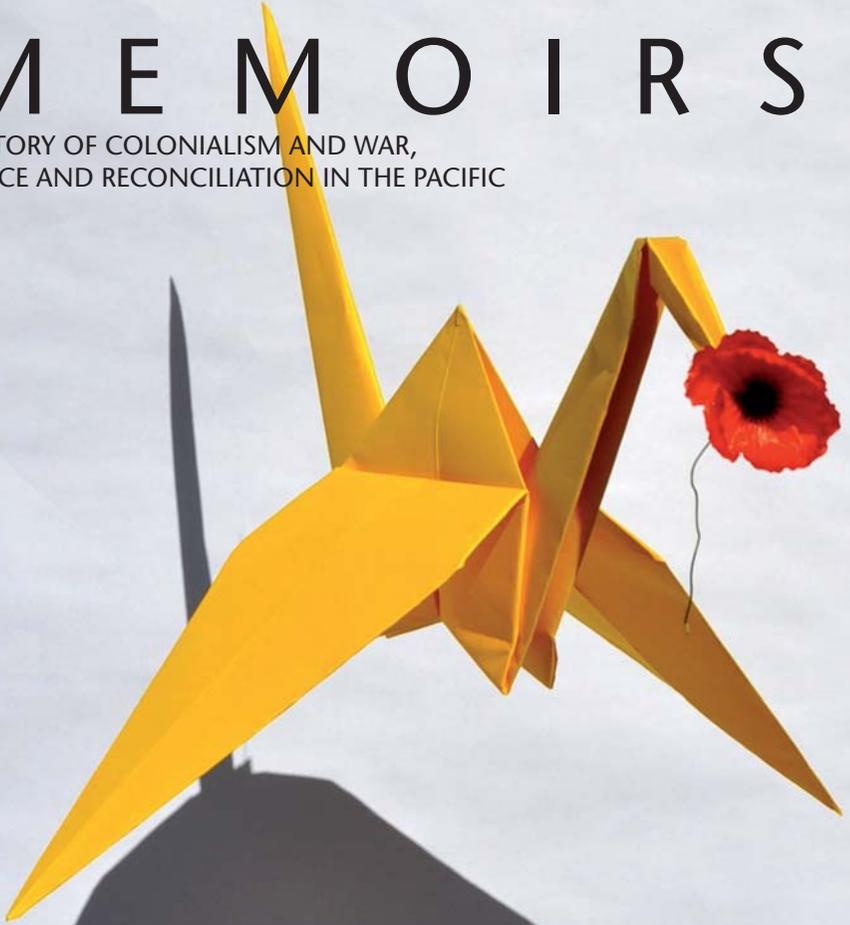


M E M O I R S

A STORY OF COLONIALISM AND WAR,
PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN THE PACIFIC



**Paul
Couvret**

A collaborative project by Edith van Loo

After having survived an atomic bomb and three years as a Japanese POW, Paul Couvret believed God had given him a second chance at life. Determined to make the most of that chance, the book tells how he chose to make a new life in Australia over his Dutch and Indonesian past. Once there, he embraced life with enthusiasm, taking on anything and everything, like - building a family, becoming a qualified pilot, a teacher, an education administrator and a successful civic figure as the Mayor of Warringah in Sydney. He brought optimism and positive thinking to everything he did, inspiring others and setting an example to all of what can be achieved by determination, hard work and an indomitable will. With this book, readers can learn of his deeds and draw inspiration from a life well lived.

Oral historian Edith van Loo was born in the Netherlands and came to Australia in 2010. She has interviewed Dutch ex-servicemen and women and POW's in Australia for the Dutch Veterans Institute and the National Library of Australia. Edith believes it is important to share the complete life stories of veterans. "These stories are being recorded not to glorify war, but to humanize military history, which is mostly about facts and figures, not about emotions or daily routine". With this 'community' approach she hopes to reach a broad range of potential readers with an in interest in Dutch Australian relations and military history.



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Contents

Chapter	Page
Introduction	13
1 Paul at high school	15
2 Tjisaroea – No Escape	20
3 Makassar	23
4 Asama Maru	27
5 Working for Dai Nippon	32
6 Food	38
7 Medical care	44
8 News and Sabotage	50
9 Keeping the Faith	54
10 A special occasion	59
11 Bombardments	63
12 The ninth of August	69
13 The days after.....	73
14 The last days in Nagasaki	79
15 Liberation at last!	84
16 Manila	90
17 The Philippines	94
18 The Naval Aviation Service in Sydney	111
19 The Naval Aviation Service at Point Piper	116
20 The Navy Solution	122
21 Back to the Netherlands	132
22 In the Netherlands	140
23 Back to Australia – and the Start of a New Life	147
24 Cowra Migrant Centre	153
25 No longer alone	158
26 A home and a new career	164
27 An Interesting life In Cowra	170
28 At last: a family	177
29 My career in education	183
30 The NSW Correspondence School	189
31 My Experiences as a Councillor	196
Epilogue	200

"I often asked myself: "why did I survive"?
I believe I was spared to tell the world of the horrors
of nuclear war and to warn the younger
generations in particular that a nuclear war will
mean the end of civilisation as we know it."

Paul Couvret

Preface

I first met Paul Couvret in August 2010 at a lunch with members of the Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women's Association (NESWA) in Sydney. Paul was the National President of the association.

I had heard stories from other Dutch veterans about Paul's experiences as a Prisoner of War (POW) in Nagasaki during World War II. At the time the atomic bomb was dropped he was only kilometers away. Paul was a charming man and a fantastic host. I guess I expected to meet someone bitter and burdened by what he had to go through during the war. On the contrary, Paul had a twinkle in his eye and appeared very vibrant, looking rather youthful. For the occasion he wore all his medals. I remember thinking: 'How did this impressive man cope with the horrors of war'?

When I started interviewing in January 2011 for the oral history project titled 'Interview Project Dutch Veterans' I asked Paul to be my first participant. The morning of the interview he picked me up at the hotel in his car and welcomed me to his family home. He was a bit tense at the beginning, leaning far over to talk into the recorder. I think he was trying not to be distracted by his wife Hilja, who was tip-toeing around the house. She was asked not to be in the same room or make any noise for the sake of good sound recordings. I was a bit nervous myself but once Paul relaxed he turned out to be a fantastic storyteller. The whole day he tirelessly discussed topics about his youth; education; wartime experiences; post war life and how he looked back on all that. He left me inspired by his resilience and ability to forgive.

Quite frankly, before I started my research to conduct this interview, I had little knowledge about the history of the Dutch East Indies, let alone any insight into wartime experiences of the Dutch in the Pacific. That part of Dutch history had only been a small section of the curriculum for Dutch historical education.

In late 2011 Paul had a stroke. It happened at home but he decided to just carry on and go on a hunting trip with his friend, Ron Humpherson the next day as planned. Soon after they left Paul ended up in the hospital. After a period of time during which he was in and out of several hospitals and a short time back home, he went to live in a War Veterans' home in Narrabeen, NSW. He was later joined there by his wife Hilja when she was also assessed as needing high level residential care. With the family home now empty, the family set about clearing out the house their mother and father had lived in for 46 years and get it ready for sale to ensure there would be sufficient funds to pay for their care.

Early in April 2013 I received an email from Paul's eldest son, Paul Junior, regarding his father's memorabilia. He and his brothers had been going through all his papers and had found a large volume of interesting items. The documents included wartime memories in Dutch, photos (some from pre-war life in Batavia) and considerable material about the Nagasaki atom bomb. Of all these, perhaps the most interesting appeared to be a cloth-bound diary, all handwritten in Dutch on the inside of cigarette packets. He had maintained this diary during his imprisonment in WWII whilst in a Japanese POW camp in Nagasaki. Paul junior felt the material could be of historical and general interest but he was concerned that if nothing was done, insights into a remarkable life would never see the light of day and asked my opinion of what to do.

I felt that I had been given a great opportunity to share Paul's experiences and insights with others and could find a good home for Paul's memoirs and papers.

His life experiences are a testimony to an eventful life filled with seemingly insurmountable challenges. That would go for the life of many of his generation: their childhood years were affected by the Great Depression, they all went through WWII and many served post-war in the Netherlands East Indies. Between 1947 and 1960, 160,000 Dutch migrants came to Australia, quite a few of them just happened to be veterans. Paul's life might have been representative in some ways of that of his fellow comrades; however everyone's life story is richly unique. As mentioned before, Paul's memoirs were in Dutch and unfortunately he did not live to fulfil his long-cherished dream of publishing his book. He passed away on the 5th of July 2013. Paul had been very instrumental in promoting the Dutch veterans' association (NESWA) and dedicated a large part of his life campaigning against nuclear weapons. It seemed only logical to ask members in and outside his community to help in translating his autobiography from Dutch to English.

The idea was: many hands make light work. That way it could be done in a relatively short period of time without any costs involved. Ideally, all the people involved in this project would bring in their own network of potential readers. Most were asked to translate one or two chapters and try their best to keep Paul's 'voice' intact. There were concerns about how to prevent some of the material getting lost in translation, especially because there were almost 30 people involved, all with different levels of English language skills.

Once it was clear that all Paul's papers would go to the National Library of Australia (NLA), that seemed an answer to this problem. Future students, researchers and anybody interested will have access to the

material, including the original memoirs in Dutch and all the information which isn't included in this book. All the translated chapters that had been returned before they were edited will also be part of Paul's files. Being responsible for getting Paul's voice heard, it feels like an enormous relief to know that all his documents will be kept safe for many years to come at the National Library of Australia's manuscripts collection.

I would like to ask you as the reader to allow yourself to read this book with an open heart and mind. When we write we all 'frame' our stories. What we 'frame' may only paint part of the picture and represents often our own point of view. It is everyone's right to decide what we like to share and for what reason we do so. We need to respect that we all may have different perspectives.

Acknowledgements

This book came together with the help of many people. First and foremost I would like to express my gratitude and deepest respect for Paul, who chose not to remain silent. My sincere appreciation for the great stories, valuable insights and learning opportunities and for sharing so generously.

The completion of this project could not have been accomplished without the support, effort and constructive feedback of all people who translated one or more chapters of Paul's memoirs. A big thank you for your enthusiasm and for translating the memoirs, to: Malina Couvret, Hans van den Akker, Ans Flynn Dolle, Peter Kloppenburg, Marjolein Coonen, Naomi van Loon, Jaap Frederiks, Marleen Honig, Frans Bloemsma, Henny Spee, Sjak Draak, Annemieke Ruigrok, Stef Scagliola, Jan. H. Vonk, Lou and Mandy Westende, Sam de Haas, Sophia Mellink, Fiona Poot, Aniek Modder, Yvon Davis, Peter Reynders, Harold Jacobs, Gerda Schiefes and her daughters: Ragnild, Arlette and Hedwig.

I cannot express enough thanks to Stef Scagliola, Keiko Tamura, Mary Anne Jebb and Bill Bunbury on whom I depended for their expertise, support, experiences in research and writing and for sharing their network. My special thanks also to Doug Hurst for being such an enthusiast and for endless discussions throughout the progress of the book over countless cups of coffee but most of all for ensuring that a variety of translations were written in a coherent story. I am very grateful to Paul Couvret Junior who meticulously worked his way through several drafts, correcting spelling and grammar mistakes, for writing the epilogue and for trusting me with his father's heritage. To Cor Lefel, who took up the job to transform the files into this book you are currently reading.

Thanks to The Australian War Memorial and the Australians at War Film Archives for waiving their fees and the Dutch Veterans Institute for enabling me to interview Paul. Unfortunately I have not been able to get in touch with Don Moore, of whom I found four drawings amongst Paul's documents which add significant value to the story for which I'm grateful. I'm much obliged for the seeding grant of the Dutch Embassy in Canberra. I'm glad to take this opportunity to declare that I'm a big fan of the National Library of Australia, in particular Kevin Bradley, Shelly Grant and Kylie Scroope. I feel blessed for their support throughout the whole journey and for enabling readers to have access to these memoirs as a free e-book.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my loving, supportive and very patient family: my husband Olaf and daughter Naomi. I feel this is *'the'* opportunity to confess that I only pretended I didn't see you rolling your eyes

when you in turn, tried to pretend you were hearing the story for the first time. For that I love you! Thank you and also my sister Fabienne and friends Lina Choudhury and Tony van Grieken for your everlasting encouragement and all the time you allowed me to go on and on talking about Paul's book. Cheers!

Edith van Loo

Introduction

By: Doug Hurst

Paul was born on 5 June 1922 in Indonesia, the first child of a Dutch couple who had moved from the Netherlands to Batavia (now Jakarta) a year previously. A second child, a daughter Nel, was born two years later.



Paul and his mother 12 Sep 1922

in Batavia where Paul completed most of his education and nearby Sukabumi.

The curriculum was based on that of the Netherlands and taught in

His father was an accountant, initially with a Dutch insurance firm and his mother a trained nurse who stopped working when she got married, which was entirely in accordance with the Dutch practice in those days. Apart from four years in Medan, the family lived



Young Paul in Java, Jan 1932

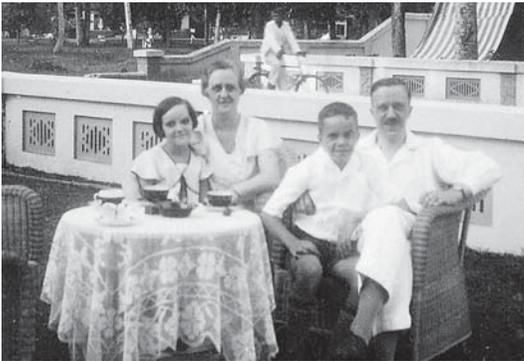


Paul and his parents in Batavia

Dutch but two important differences helped shape his life: firstly his classmates included children of Chinese, Dutch-Indonesian, Arabic and English background and secondly school started early in the morning and finished at noon, giving him time for things other than school.



Paul and his sister Nel taken by Fotoco Fam Koopmans kunstegraaf Batavia-C 1934



Paul and family in Batavia



Paul, sister Nel, mama and dad Soekaboemi 1941, after December 1941 he would never see his parents again

Most people took a siesta in the afternoon but Paul instead built model airplanes and dreamt of being a pilot. He thought his goal was in sight when he was selected for Navy pilot training in 1941 but the Japanese put an end to that and he only learned to fly after the war in Cowra, in western New South Wales.

His secondary schooling was interrupted for nine months by a bout of dysentery. His mother nursed him through it but was always alert to this nasty disease and, unlike many other Dutch mothers with servants, prepared all their food herself.

Other than that he enjoyed school and enthusiastically tackled everything from gymnastics to art and sport of all kinds. He was a good scholar despite some high-spirited pranks - one of which got him expelled for a week or so - and eventually qualified as a teacher.



College school captain 1941,
before he joined the forces

Chapter 1

Translated by: Malina Couvret

Chapter 1 begins with Paul at high school and war on the horizon. His carefree youth over, he later wrote of these times:

Looking back, I had many good times at College and learned much that stayed with me for life. Mr. van As provided me with a lifelong interest in zoology, botany and our environment; 'Lange Haan', with his excursions to Old Batavia, got me interested in history and Mr. Haantjes laid the foundations of my painting and drawing activities.

And, although I didn't foresee it, the English language Mr. Roggeveen taught me proved invaluable and - perhaps surprising to some - I often found the German I learned from Mr. van Straalen useful in Australia.

But it wasn't all academic. The gymnastics I learned from Mr. de Haan encouraged me to become a gymnastic teacher myself which I did at Sydney University after the war.

Our wonderful time in Batavia came to a sudden end on 8 December 1941. I still remember very well how, in the early morning, the radio broadcast was suddenly interrupted and we heard the Dutch national

anthem, the 'Wilhelmus'. This was very unusual. Then we heard the voice of our Governor General of the East Indies, Mr. Tjarda van Stakenborgh Stachouwer who told us that our government had declared war on Japan in response to their attack on Pearl Harbour.

We went to school but there wasn't much teaching that day. From then on, many things changed and our carefree life was over. Before long, all the boys of my class - 18 years and up - had to report for Mobilisation. I found time to get on the train and go to Sukabumi where my parents were living, to say goodbye. Although I had no way of knowing it, this would be the last time I would see them alive. Dad died in the Sukamiskin prison and mummy died of starvation at the Ambarawa Banyu Camp.

I will never forget the moment my dad bade me farewell. He stood on the platform of Sukabumi station and said: 'Paul, I hope you'll never do anything I'd be ashamed of'. Mother had stayed at home, where she, in tears, had embraced me when I left. She gave me a small copy of the New Testament in which she had written on the front page: 'He who has a heart for God in light days shall find God in his heart when the days are dark'.

Less than four months later I realised this deep truth, when imprisoned in Makassar.

Thus we began our days as conscripts in the KNIL, the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army. The government was totally unprepared for the hundreds of young men that suddenly showed up. We were housed in barracks with cement floors, for mattresses we were given a large sack we had to fill ourselves with straw to make a bed.

During the day we were kept occupied with gymnastics and marching with wooden rifles. The Japanese spies, who were everywhere, must have died laughing! All in all I didn't think much of it and when a call-up came for volunteers for the Navy, stationed in Surabaya, I grabbed the chance of better training.

On New Year's Eve a train, filled with volunteers, left for Surabaya. Here things were completely different. I passed for "aspirant aviator" and was sent to the Gubeng barracks for elementary training. My watch had a very good boatswain whose task it was to drill ordinary boys into proper members of the Navy within two months.

Day and night it was all hands on deck. We had to march there as well but that was with the real guns we had to shoot with on the shooting

range. We also learned to row, swim and climb with ropes and ladders. What the servants had done for us at home we now had to learn to do ourselves, like washing our togs, ironing and sewing.

We were given gas masks and learned how to use them in the gas tent. We saw films showing the effects of mustard gas and were taught first aid in case of injuries. We learned to tie all sorts of knots and learned the use of a block and tackle.

We thought we were learning new and useful things that would come in handy in the future. In the meantime the war came ever closer, as one day Surabaya was bombed. We had to get into the trenches and heard the shrapnel of the anti-aircraft shells falling around us.

Nothing came of the flight training. The flight Academy was bombed by the Japanese Zeros and after the Battle of the Java Sea the Navy decided to evacuate us to Australia.¹

In the night we went by train to Tjilatjap, on the Javanese south coast. Here we waited a whole day and on the night of 2 March 1942 we boarded 'Tjisaroea', a freighter of the Java-China-Japan line.

On board were around 500 Navy personnel: officers, petty officers and able seamen. We knew, of course, that the Japanese were patrolling the Indian Ocean south of Java with their surface fleet and submarines and we were thus at risk of being torpedoed. So our watch decided to sit aft, as high as possible.

The first night nothing happened and also the second night we steamed on undisturbed. The night after: no drama. The next morning at 11 o' clock on 4 March we had to line up on deck. An officer told us that if we could steam on this day without being detected, we'd arrive in Fremantle in two days time. Unluckily, an hour later a Japanese seaplane came into view. It circled around us at a safe distance and disappeared again.

1 At this stage the Dutch planned to run flying training in Australia and had positioned some training aircraft there. Instead, hundreds of Dutch aviators were trained in Jackson, Mississippi, with help from the US Army Air Corps. Some graduates went to England but many returned to Australia to fly B-25s, P-40s and transports. *Doug Hurst*.

Two hours later we saw several white dots on the horizon. At first we took them for proa sails². But when they approached we realised they were the white bow waves of Japanese naval vessels steaming towards us at full power. We were soon surrounded by three battle cruisers and two destroyers with all guns trained on us. Tjisaroea had one 7.5 cm. gun aft. Fortunately our Commander decided not to start a fight and stopped the engines.

Before a prize crew came aboard all guns and documents were thrown overboard. It was a scary sight when one of the battle cruisers drew alongside and sent a boat over. The Japanese came aboard, disarmed our ship's gun and then came a fearful moment: they lowered the Dutch flag and hoisted the Japanese war flag, the rising sun! The cruiser crew yelled a threefold 'Banzai' and now Tjisaroea was a Japanese ship.

What was to happen next? Would they throw us all overboard? We understood they wanted to keep the ship but what were their plans for us? It soon became clear we wouldn't be thrown overboard. The Japanese quickly took charge and headed our ship north, back to Indonesia, now captured by Dai Nippon and in some ways life on board went on as usual. The bridge and some other areas were off limits.

Everyday life on board the ship went on; we had our normal meals and the kitchen had a hard job feeding all the officers and sailors.

Japanese soldiers (probably marines) walked about everywhere and for them it looked like an interesting experience to guard soldiers of a defeated enemy. They were friendly guys and we tried to talk to them by gestures and drawings on scraps of paper. We, of course, wanted to know where we were heading. The Japanese didn't know either but we all knew we were steaming in a northerly direction.

The Japanese were quite interested in our watches and leather belts and they wanted to buy them with Japanese money. We were clueless as to what this money was worth or where we could spend it, so not much dealing was done. Their attitude was reassuring; we had expected far worse treatment. But that came later, when we were handed over to the Japanese army.

2 A type of sailing boat originating in Malaysia and Indonesia that may be sailed with either end at the front, typically having a large triangular sail and an outrigger.

There was great excitement when we saw land again. It appeared to be the Lombok Straits, on Java's eastern end. We arrived early in the evening, not knowing if we would be set ashore there, or if would we steam on to the Java Sea, towards an unknown destiny.

The strait is quite narrow in places and a group of good swimmers had the idea of escaping from the ship and swimming to either Bali or Lombok. It looked like a feasible plan and the swimmers asked me to come with them. At that time I was captain of the Navy water polo team at the Gubeng Barracks and a tolerable swimmer, so I agreed to join them.

At nightfall, while the ship steamed on, we went aft to see how we could jump overboard without getting into the wake, or be fatally hit by the propeller. We had filled the cans containing our gas masks with emergency rations - stolen from the life boats - and had made them watertight with adhesive tape, tied our boots to our life vests and were ready to jump.

Our spy warned us the Japanese were coming so we disappeared in all directions. It gave me time to think about the risks and dangers.

Would it be possible to keep out of the ships wake? Would we be able to stay together in the water? How strong was the current? What were the chances of shark attacks? And even if we reached Bali or Lombok, how would the local community treat us? I decided it was wiser not to jump in the end. I don't know whether or not some of the men jumped but there were no success stories.

The next day we were in the Java Sea, still heading north. Was Japan our goal?

Chapter 2

Translated by: Hans van den Akker

Tjisaroea – No Escape

On 8 May the answer came. Land on the starboard side - Makassar Harbour on the South Western tip of what was then called the Celebes, now Sulawesi. It was a sorry sight. All barracks on the quay were blown to pieces and burnt, a result of the 'scorched earth' policy.

Tjisaroea moored and we prisoners of war (POW's) had to line up on shore, where we were counted and, for the first time, saw Japanese soldiers in action. They shouted all sorts of commands we didn't understand but with the help of rifle butts, fists and smacks in our faces we learned very quickly what they meant.

The numbering in the front row posed a problem as well, because we couldn't count in Japanese, so the soldiers had to do that for us. But some of these Japanese guys even had problems with that and simple multiplications appeared to be near impossible for the limited arithmetic abilities of some of them. We looked at them aghast and really wondered - how could an army like this defeat us?

In the end the officers - adorned with nasty-looking swords, not a very pleasant sight - decided on a certain number and we were marched off. Along the streets curious locals looked at all these navy people

surrounded by Japanese guards. The former rulers, who had suppressed the Buginese pirates, were now mastered by Dai Nippon. Our hearts sank when we arrived at the prison and marched through the gate. It was very clear we had completely lost our freedom!

I ended up in a large cell intended for some 20 native prisoners. It was a rectangular room with a high ceiling and a small window we couldn't reach. The bare walls were made of whitewashed cement; it had a concrete floor and an iron door. On both sides, 50 cm above the floor, wooden duckboards were attached where 10 persons could sleep side by side - without mattresses or mats. So there was room for 10 people to lie, the rest had to sit on the sides.

We made up a schedule so that everyone would be able to lie for 8 hours. Sleeping was difficult because there were always people who wanted to talk. For a toilet there was one big, wooden tub that was emptied once a day. Since the tub was designed for the use of 20 people at most, the first days it often overflowed, until we were able to persuade the guards to empty the tub at least twice a day.

We couldn't wash in this room and the Japanese didn't deem it necessary for us to use the bathroom. But we were 'aired' a couple of minutes a day - heavily guarded! - and what a luxury that was! Delightful fresh air instead of the stench in the cell we were imprisoned in day and night. Every now and then a guard rolled out a fire hose and we had a chance to be hosed off. After that you had the feeling you were a tiny bit cleaner.

There were hardly any rations. Once a day we were given a bit of stone-like rusk. That was our breakfast, lunch and dinner. After a couple of days we were dizzy with hunger and we thought we'd collapse of malnutrition. But no - after a week we were still alive, two weeks later as well and on and on it went. Of course we didn't spend much energy, being locked up day and night in this cell.

The worst was that after two weeks we started to suffer from constipation. I'll never ever forget the moment that 'Daddy' Janssen from the sick bay came around and gave everyone a spoonful of castor oil. Can you imagine - it tasted wonderful and it worked!

One day we heard a lot of noise outside the prison, as if a demonstration was going on. Apparently the locals were planning to take over the prison in order to massacre the Dutch.

Here we have to give credit to the Japanese who protected us from being attacked by the angry mob. They hit hard on this crowd and mistreated the Indonesians as badly as the POWs.

After weeks of boredom, with nothing to do, read, write or see, we had a growing feeling of despair. But then all of a sudden we had to prepare for transport. We were loaded into trucks and transported to a former KNIL base. This was a great improvement. The complex consisted of a number of barracks buildings, a few halls and sheds and some houses for officers and sailors. All the buildings were surrounded by a fence and barbed wire. Sentries guarded the complex day and night.

I was brought to a hall with about a hundred men. In some ways it was paradise compared to the prison cell with a mattress to sleep on and freedom to walk around the camp. In other ways it was anything but. The Japanese were walking around with sticks and wooden baseball bats. They liked to use these sticks on the defenceless POW's. To humiliate us they had sadistic rules that changed without notice.

We always had to stand still and bow every time a Japanese soldier passed by. For us as proud Dutchmen it was hard to get used to this custom. The hitting and beating up always was done in sight of all of us. So in the end, we just had to get used to bowing for the Japanese.

The base kitchen had been built for a whole battalion so there was enough capacity. The meals improved and we had food three times a day. It wasn't home but much better than the prison. The Japanese also used some of the stocks they found in Makassar. This rice was sometimes burned. But the Japanese said it was our own fault since we set it in fire. 'Now you eat it yourselves.' It tasted like 'norit'. (editor's note: an activated carbon product)

Most of us still had some money that we used to buy extra food from the locals who walked around outside the fence. Once you had made a deal, you threw a stone with the order over the fence. The next day the food would arrive, you paid as agreed and the food was thrown over the fence. It was a lively trade based on mutual trust. I bought a lot of 'goelah djawa' (Javanese sugar), this way, to pimp my rice.

It was much easier to stay clean since there were enough bathrooms and we learned to wash our clothes without soap. It didn't take long before the Japanese announced orderly duty. We were loaded in trucks with heavily armed guards and transported to the harbour. Here we had to clean up the mess from the blown up sheds near the seaside. There were always enough volunteers since this meant a trip outside the fence and the camp - and it was attractive for other reasons as well.

Chapter 3

Translated by: Ans Flynn Dolle

Makassar

Clearing the piles of rubble on the quay at the harbour of Makassar was quite heavy work but we soon found it had a good side - there were often useful things under the stacks of burnt goods stored in the sheds. I found teacups, spoons and forks, new boots and shirts and socks but the most important find were burnt cans of food. Usually in stacks, on the outside they were scorched black but when we cut them with the pickaxe we found the contents were still good.

Thus we enjoyed green and brown beans, peas, herrings in tomato sauce, tinned meat and thick soup. We had to eat these treats in secret or try to take them with us and smuggle them into the camp. This was not without risk because often when we returned from a fatigue exercise, we would be searched. Sometimes we tried to coerce the Japanese guards to try the tinned food we found but mostly they didn't like the taste.

One day we found a vat of red wine. It was fortified wine and we filled our canteens with this delicious liquid. The guards became suspicious when our gang became merrier and merrier so we decided to show the vat to the Japanese. They were happy to have a taste and the result was that a whole row of Japanese, all soldiers, partook of the red wine until suddenly the Commander arrived on the scene. He

was furious and we had to destroy the vat. He stood there roaring at his own soldiers. Some of them had difficulty standing at attention because they had drunk so much.

The whole troupe and our group were loaded on trucks and returned to the camp. At the gate we were searched and had to empty our canteens and after this all the half drunk Japanese and prisoners of war had to run around and around the camp. The Commander had a stick and followed us on his bicycle. He thought all that jogging was the best way to get everyone sober. It was a ridiculous sight; the half drunk men, Japanese and prisoners; everyone laughing and as a result of the wine, suddenly friends. They helped each other if they fell over, assisted each other if they stumbled and finally the Commander gave up and sent the whole lot to their barracks.

Another time the boys found a pile of eggs which had not spoiled. At the end of the day they put as many eggs as possible in their pockets and under their hats so they could smuggle them into the camp. Unfortunately, on their return to the camp this troupe had to line up and the Japanese found the eggs.

They thought up an original way of punishment. The boys with the eggs had to stand in two rows, ten metres from each other and the order came to shoot each other with the eggs. If we did not throw fast enough the Japanese took over and tried to smash the eggs in one's face. Five minutes later all the eggs were gone and a slimy group of prisoners immediately stood under the showers fully dressed.

We were also used as gardeners in the brothels that the Japanese had set up in Makassar. These were mostly large bungalows in which Europeans or rich Chinese had lived before the war. Without the guards noticing the girls often gave us extra food or a packet of cigarettes.

We also tried to obtain news from the girls but their radios mostly played Japanese music. We wanted to know how the war was progressing but what news we got was all still very dismal.

The Japanese forces were winning everywhere and they were busy bombing Australia before their planned occupation. For us, liberation seemed to be further and further into the future. We heard news about naval battles. The Coral Sea battle was reported as a big victory for the Japanese over the Americans. We had no way of knowing that the battle was actually a draw and had thwarted Japanese plans to occupy the southern parts of PNG, so it all looked very black for us.

Our officers and translators tried to find out what the Japanese were planning for us prisoners but nobody seemed to know. So it was no wonder that a group of spiritualists regularly held séances to ask the spirits what our future would be. An Indian man in one of the halls had a reputation as a good medium. One evening a small group of us held a séance with him.

He used two round sticks bound together in the form of a cross with a nail in the middle. The medium and three of us had to hold each end of the sticks above the table on which there was an alphabet in large letters. We all had to remain silent and concentrate until the medium received contact with the spirit. That happened after a couple of minutes and I was allowed to ask the first question. I asked: "What will happen to me?"

I shall never forget it. To my amazement the cross began to move as if it was charged with electricity. It went from one letter to the next and someone wrote the letters on a piece of paper. The message was: "You are going to make a long sea voyage." I then asked: "When and where to?" But nothing more happened.

As you can imagine, I was amazed: "A sea voyage!" As a born optimist I explained what it would mean. Soon we would be liberated, Makassar would be recaptured and then we would go to America to continue the war. The amazing thing is that a couple of months later I indeed did have a long journey on the Japanese "Asama Maru", a large troopship that took us to Nagasaki.

One of the rumours we heard in the camp was that landings had taken place on Timor. We were unable to discover where the news source came from, it was said to be "Kabar Angin." However, three of our prisoners decided to escape and to then sail by boat to freedom in Timor. The watch in the camp was fairly slack; the Japanese possibly thought that a fugitive would be killed by the native people.

I cannot remember the names of those three men but I do know that one of them was an adventurous man who with a couple of companions had, just before the war, paddled canoes from Holland to Indonesia. That trip had taken 18 months. It was no wonder that he thought he had a good chance to escape.

I do not know where or how those three managed to crawl through the enclosure but I do know that hell broke loose at the first roll call of the day when it appeared that three from our hall were missing. Yoshida, the camp Commander, suspected that all of the 100 men in our hall had assisted the escapees. He told us he would lock up 10 hostages

for each of the escapees and that all 30 would be beheaded if those three fugitives did not return within a week.

Our translator told Yoshida that the Geneva Convention¹ forbade such retribution but Yoshida had never heard of it, said the translator was insolent and hit him on the face with his fists. He then counted out 30 men and marched them to the watch house at the gate. I was number 31 in the row.

And so began a frightening time for us all. Would the Japanese carry out their threats, would the three escapees, betrayed by the native people, be recaptured? We had little contact with the hostages but the boys who had to bring them their food returned with the news that during the day the thirty men were moved to another place where they had to dig 30 graves. Their salvation came 5 days later when a truck filled with soldiers and the three escapees drove through the gate.

They had been betrayed by the natives before they had got a boat in which to sail away. The three courageous men who had escaped were beheaded as an example for us all. A cold chill ran through the whole camp and the officers forbade us to try and make any attempt at escape. In any case, after witnessing the terrible death of our mates, there was little enthusiasm for attempting escape.

The couple of months in this camp were the “best” of the three years and seven months we experienced as prisoners of war. We were not forced to work every day, we could walk around between the buildings in the camp and there was enough to eat. The health in the camp was good and there was not much sickness. But Dai Nippon had other plans for us, such as work gangs for the construction of airfields in the Celebes, the Burma railway and workers for the war industry of Japan itself. The first group taken from the camp went to Japan and I was in that group.

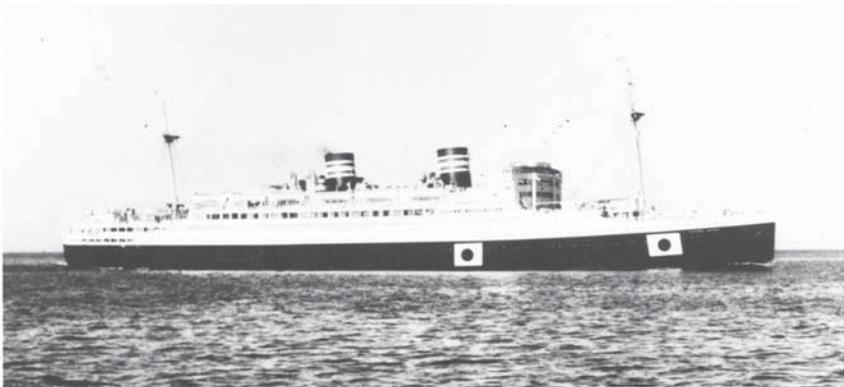
1 Japan had not signed the Geneva Convention.

Chapter 4

By: Edith van Loo

Asama Maru

This chapter tells how Paul was selected to board the Asama Maru. It describes his experiences on this Japanese troopship and the arrival at Nagasaki. Although this chapter was missing in Paul's documents, this reconstruction uses his personal narratives, collected from several recordings and interviews and the outline he wrote for the chapter. In accordance with that outline, it starts with a significant need of labour for the Japanese war effort and then tells how he was chosen to work in the Nagasaki shipyard.



Asama Maru, photo: AWM no. 302953

One day he was called out to what seemed to be a general assembly but once on parade all were told to undress. Everyone had to stand in a long line in front of the place where they slept. A team of Japanese doctors came along while they were standing there naked. Paul presumed they were doctors, because they were dressed in long white coats. He thought it was a bit like Hansel and Gretel: *"the 'doctors' thoroughly looked us over, feeling our muscles, our biceps to see how strong they were. They even felt our testicles. Maybe they were checking whether our tools were bigger than they were used to, I don't know. We were very insulted."*¹

Every now and again, as the Japanese 'doctors' walked past and checked out the POW's, they would tell someone to take *one* step forward. Eventually, one thousand men were selected and the rest sent back. Paul, who was in pretty good condition from before the war, was one of those who had to step forward. The men selected were given an extra issue of clothing and got ready to leave.

None were particularly keen on leaving their relatively 'good' life in Makassar. Their stay in that camp in Makassar had not been too hard. There was enough to eat, they had the possibility of a daily shower and there were even opportunities to play games.²

Paul cannot recall how he got to the harbour but by the time he arrived and saw the big troopship, he knew he was going somewhere far away. Throughout the ten-day trip onboard the Asama Maru, he had no clue about the final destination. Obviously he must be sent somewhere into the tropics, he thought, because they'd given him all tropical clothes. The Japanese wouldn't say a word, so he guessed they were going to another island. Some of the navigators amongst them noticed they were going north. They worked out by the speed of the ship that they had passed North of Borneo and continued heading north.

Life on board of the Asama Maru was no joke. This former Japanese luxury liner had been converted into a troopship. They spent most of their time in the hold. It was stifling hot, overcrowded and badly ventilated with very little space to sit or lie down. They slept on canvas stretchers and were allowed out for fresh air sometimes twice a day, in the morning and/or afternoon. 'Their' part of the deck had a big toilet block and bathrooms. Of all things, in that bathroom the Japanese kept a Komodo dragon - a very large lizard from Indonesia with a bad temper and a toxic bite. Paul later said: *"They had pinched that from the zoo somewhere and they were going to take it to Japan. That bloody*

1 Paul Couvret, Australians at War Film Archive, Archive nr. 1333

2 Paul Couvret, 2010 Interviewed Edith van Loo

thing was in our showers and the shower recesses were flooded by about 6 inches so that the thing had water to make it habitable”³.

Consequently, visiting the bathroom was potentially dangerous. They had to look for the Komodo dragon and wait till it was out of reach before doing whatever they were there to do. Imagine what it must have felt like when the sea was running and water went from side to side as the ship swayed, possibly taking the Komodo dragon with it as it did so. Komodo dragons are meat eaters and have been known to attack people. The POW’s fed him with meat but Paul didn’t know where they got it. The Komodo dragon frightened everybody but fortunately it never attacked any of the POWs.

On top of all that there were a couple of alarms for allied submarines - or perhaps they were false alarms. During an alarm everybody on the ship became frantic. The Japanese ran around, rushing the POW’s back down into the hold. Nobody onboard felt very pleased with the Americans coming so close. It was quite clear that if the ship was going to be torpedoed all would go down. The Japanese, armed with machine guns, stood on top of the stairs to stop the prisoners from getting out. Not knowing what else was yet to come, Paul truly felt relieved when they threw out the anchor on arrival.

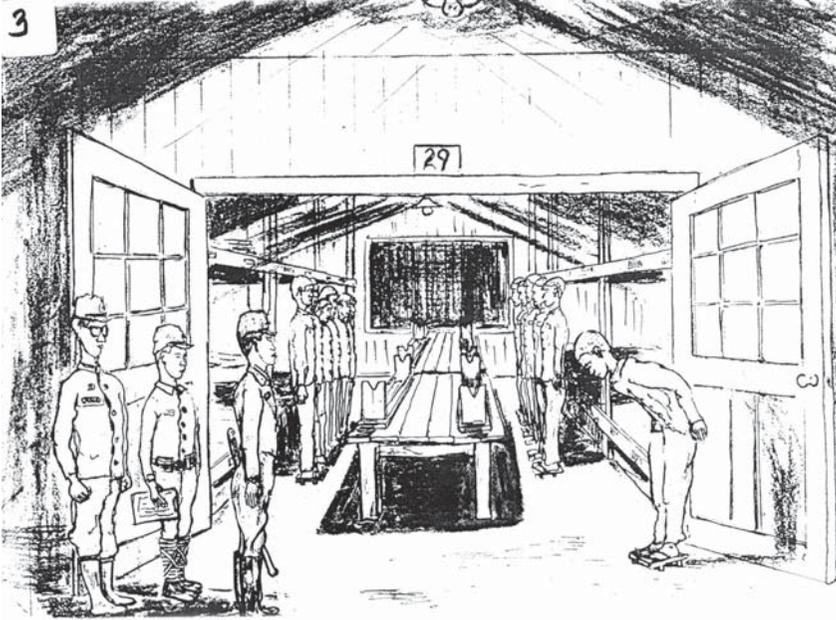
At Nagasaki harbour he was put ashore. From there he was taken by a ferry to the Kama Minami Shipyard⁴. He remembered the grey landscapes and lack of colour and realised that the chance to escape had become almost zero. And even if he did, like many of the Dutch, with his blue eyes and blond hair, he would stand out like the proverbial sore thumb amongst the Japanese population.

The arrival at the camp was actually a pleasant surprise. After previous experiences he did not expect to be ‘welcomed’ by the Kama Minami Shipyard management and taken on tour to be shown what a ‘nice’ place it was to work. As a new worker for the shipyard they made him believe that he would be well looked after. They assured him that as soon as Japan had won the war, he could go back to his loved ones. Next he was brought to a large hall for dinner. The meal that followed – nice rice and fish with a tasty condiment made out of seaweed – reinforced the favourable first impressions. That night Paul counted his blessings before going to sleep.

The camp he settled into was new and purpose-built in a traditionally Japanese way to house the workers of the shipyard. The long

3 Paul Couvret, *Australians at War* Film Archive, Archive nr. 1333

4 Editor’s note: The name of the ship yard is Kawanami Ship Building Yard but since I have found Kama Minami Shipyard in more articles, we didn’t change the name Paul used in this book.



Drawing of barracks by Don Moore.

barracks buildings were situated in a square and divided into many rooms. All rooms had two levels of bunks made simply of just wooden boards and arranged in two rows along opposite sides of the room. There were 40 people to a room with ten on top and ten on the bottom bunks on each side.

In between the bunks were two long tables and benches, separated in the middle by a hole in the floor which was meant to put hot coals in. *(Regrettably, Paul would never get any heat from it, except once when the Red Cross came to inspect the camp. For that occasion every room got one shovel of hot coals from the cookhouse to make it look as if the fire-place had been used).*⁵

Like all the other prisoners he only got a single grey blanket to keep himself warm at night. There was no mattress or regular pillow, just a Japanese pillow – a little square - on which to rest his head. Very healthy according to the Japanese but for him it was most uncomfortable. To sleep Paul used some rags and his meagre extra clothing to make a ball as a makeshift pillow..

The following day the Japanese called for volunteers to work in the

5 Drawing by Don Moore, Paul Couvret, Australians at War Film Archive, Archive nr. 1333

shipyard. About a quarter of the men went but Paul and the rest didn't approve of their action and didn't go. All knew they were working on the equivalent of the American Liberty ship – freighters, ten thousand tonners. The men who refused to go booed those going to work.

The stay-puts felt supported by the Geneva Convention which effectively said, in Paul's words, that: *"Working on a shipyard, that's war industry for Japan and we don't have to work in there because the Geneva Convention says you can't do that. You can't ask POWs to work in a war industry."*⁶ In hindsight Paul said they had never heard of the Geneva Convention but they nevertheless believed it was wrong to volunteer to help the enemy even under duress.

Of course it didn't take the Japanese management long to come up with a tactical move to get everybody to work. That first day when Paul and the others went to dinner expecting a meal only those who had been to work were fed. The stay-puts didn't get anything. Another strategy was then tried: half the men were going to work and sharing their food with the other half who stayed at the barracks. But soon the ones who went to work needed their food and in the end most surrendered. The hard labour made the workers so hungry that very few felt like sharing their meals. By the end of the week, all the POWs had 'volunteered' to work side by side with Japanese civilians at the shipyard.

6 Paul Couvret, 2010 Interviewed Edith van Loo

Chapter 5

Translated by: Peter Kloppenburg

Working for Dai Nippon

The one thousand prisoners of war who arrived with the SS “Osama Maru” in Nagasaki on 24 October 1942 were nearly all navy personnel. The Japanese managers of Dai Nippon shipbuilding yard assumed that we all knew about building ships because we were navy personnel. A mistaken assumption for sure!

I was typical of most prisoners and knew nothing about ship building. We had many and varied backgrounds, few of which involved ships. In my case I had been enrolled at a training school for teachers before the Second World War. My technical skills went no further than performing maintenance on my bicycle and assembling model airplanes using balsa wood and rice paper. Plastics had not been discovered in those days and I can still see my yellow Beechcraft biplane standing on top of the wardrobe. That was my best result in model making!

I was also good at gymnastics, an advantage when it came to climbing and assembling the scaffolding on the side of the ships we were constructing. Some of the scaffolding was 10 metres above the floor of the dock. If you fell off from that height you were dead.

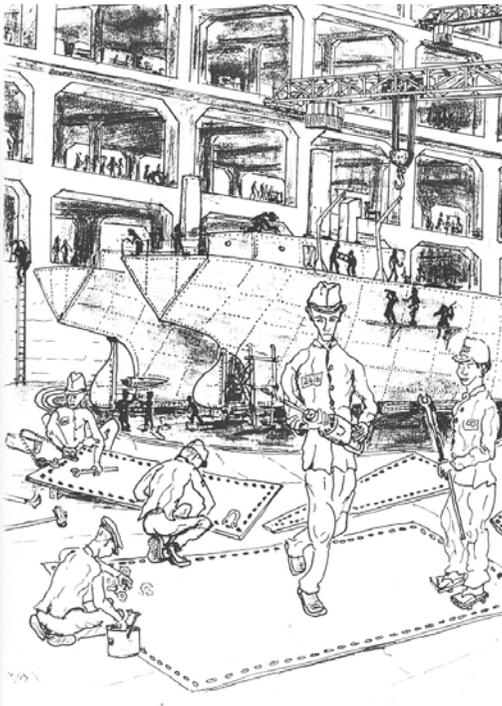
I was assigned to a Japanese “Hantjo” – a foreman of a group of sheet-iron workers. Each group consisted of seven individuals: three

Japanese, three prisoners and the foreman.

Our job was to assemble steel plates using bolts and nuts. The steel plates were attached to the ribs of the hull of the 10,000-ton freighters that were built on the shipbuilding wharf.

We had to tighten up the bolts and nuts with the help of half metre-long spanners and sledgehammers. The three of us worked, two persons on the outside of the ship on scaffolding two boards wide and one person on the inside. A bolt was inserted into one of the holes of the steel plate, from the inside and held in place with a ring spanner. The two on the outside then attached a nut to the protruding bolt and screwed it on, also using a ring spanner.

When we had tightened up a whole row of bolts and nuts, the foreman came to inspect our work. If he managed to tighten one of the screws a quarter turn, he told us how weak we were. On top of that, there was a possibility of being hit on the head for doing bad work.



**Working for Dai Nippon at the shipyard
by Don Moore**

supplied with special conical shaped steel pins that were hammered into the partly aligned holes to line them up.

If the foreman was satisfied that the plates were tightly fixed the riveters came to fill the rows of empty holes with rivets. After that, we came back to remove all the bolts and nuts so that the riveters could fill these remaining holes with rivets.

Speech was inaudible because of the thunderous noise during the ship's construction.

We communicated with each other by knocking on the steel plate or by inserting our fingers through one of the bolt-holes. The plates were often bent and the holes did not fit. We were then

To achieve this two men were required on the scaffolding, one with the sledgehammer and one to hold the steel pin in place. I hated this task because there was always a chance to finish up with a smashed hand. It was also dangerous to stand on a thirty centimetre-wide board and swing the sledgehammer up and down so many metres above the ground.

We learned all these skills from instructions by the Japanese. Tightening of bolts and nuts was easy to learn but learning how to bring non-aligned holes together by swinging a sledgehammer without falling off the scaffolding was much more difficult.

The Japanese bosses were annoyed that we were so dumb and unable to understand the Japanese language. In addition to that we were sometimes deliberately very slow to learn something new not wishing to go out of our way to learn quickly how to support the Japanese war industry. "You are so stupid and dumb, it is no wonder that you lost the war" said an interpreter who was recruited to encourage us to greater exertion.

The quality of the tools we used was also not good and when something broke it was always our fault and inexperience. If you had an ill-disposed foreman you risked getting a beating from him.

As much as we wished to as plate workers we did not have much chance to work slowly as saboteurs of Dai Nippon. We were usually in view of the military police who always kept a sharp look-out. The only way to slow down the work was by dropping a spanner or a sledgehammer from the scaffolding. You then had to climb down to collect the tool from the floor of the dock. With all that climbing up and down, it was hardly worth the effort.

We worked in various weather conditions, sun, rain, cold wind, hail and snow.

Sometimes, the locals in our group sheltered from the weather but we had to continue with our work. With no raincoats, no wonder many of us got pneumonia.

Because we worked in the same spot without having to walk around, it was a problem to keep warm. We had no woollen or flannel underwear or sweaters. All our clothes were made of cotton meant for use in the tropics. Even different layers of cotton did not help against the wind when you stood high on a scaffold 10 metres above the ground.

We began to look for ways to insulate ourselves against the cold wind. First, we tried empty cement bags wrapped around our chests. That worked well unless you were sensitive to cement dust resulting in a painful skin inflammation. If that happened, you could try Japanese newspapers. You could find them in the toilets.

But newspapers had the disadvantage of bad quality and after a few days of use collapsed in a heap. The paper corsets also reduced our mobility when climbing the scaffolds. However despite these drawbacks they were excellent in reducing the effect of the ice-like winds from Siberia. The winter months were the worst time for prisoners of war who had to work outside.

Our work as plate workers was not as tiring as that of the men who were selected for the riveting groups. The Japanese managers on the ship-building wharf selected the strongest and largest men for training as riveters. They did heavy work during thunderous noise when pneumatic hammers rammed down the white-hot rivets in the steel plates.

A group of riveters was larger than the other work groups. To start with there were two or three men attending to the removable heater. They used coal as fuel and a hose with compressed air as bellows. Their task was to make the rivets white-hot in the fire. One rivet was then removed from the fire by means of a pair of tongs and thrown to the assistant riveter. He used a metal funnel to collect the white-hot rivet and using a pair of tongs, inserted the rivet into the next empty rivet hole.

I was always amazed how those men could throw and catch those rivets. Naturally, it did not always work and if they missed there was the chance to get burned. All riveters were issued with long leather gloves. That reduced the chance of injury but their clothes were full of black holes caused by sparks.

The riveters worked at both sides of the hull in order to ensure tightness of fit and thereby exclude leakage. The rivet hammers were heavy, metal cylinders with a piston that was moved up and down by air pressure supplied by a rubber hose. This setup made an enormous amount of noise and the only protection was an ear plug of paper. The high-pressure hoses were connected to a compressor. If it broke down all work stopped.

The Japanese managers demanded so many rivets per day of every riveter group. If they did not reach that figure, they were beaten up. However if they overreached their target on a day they received more food. Some of the groups worked hard to earn more food. But many prisoners of war criticised this - after all, it benefited the Japanese war industry. But the riveters took no notice of this: if you are hungry all principles go overboard.

Although ships were put together using rivet technology they also had electric welders at work. They were used here and there for various jobs. Prisoners of war used as electric welders were usually mechanics who had learned this skill in the navy and were often better tradesmen than the Japanese welders.

But it was often dangerous work because of defective electric connections and switches and insufficient earth connections causing electric shocks. On top of that the welders worked often without a leather apron to protect them against sparks and ultra violet radiation.

Other prisoners worked as drillers. Their task was to drill holes in steel plates 25 mm thick. Using the large drill machines it was easy to drill holes in plates that were lying down horizontally. But when the plate was in a vertical position you often heard swearing and cursing because it was difficult and dangerous to work with a heavy tool so high above the ground.

The best job was, without doubt, the fitter and turner. A number of us were assigned to perform this work in the shed making parts for machines used in the dockyard. It did not take long before the Japanese realised that the skillfulness of our machinists was much higher than that of their own people. In all, the fitter and turners did fairly well. They worked in a large shed, protected against bad weather. It was not heavy work, there was variety and always something new to make.

Beginning in 1945, the fitter and turners became very popular with the men with whom they shared accommodation in our camp. The reason was the discovery that the Japanese had brought in large tins with ground nut oil for use as lubricating oil. There was a shortage of grease and lubricating oil and a substitute was required.

Our fitter and turners smuggled the oil into the camp using their water bottles and either distributed the oil to their mates or exchanged it for goods. It was fantastic - one spoonful of this oil over the rice during the evening meal and during the following day you could easily withstand the cold.

It did not take long for the managers to discover that their own workers also took advantage of the situation and took their share of the oil. The managers worked out a way to make the oil useless for consumption by mixing it with kerosene. That tasted horrible.

But prisoners of war are very resourceful. Our fitter and turners filled an empty tin with charcoal to use as a filter for the combined ground nut oil and kerosene. This process reduced the bad taste sufficiently to make it edible again. Unfortunately, it did not take long before all the oil was consumed.

Chapter 6

Translated by: Marjolein Coonen

Food

It still surprises me how little food a person needs to be able to work a full day and to still stay alive. For breakfast and dinner we received a small bowl with rice and kaffircorn and for lunch we got a tin can with a little lid with the same food that we took to the dockyard. The tin cans were similar in size to the elliptical cans of herring in tomato sauce that you can buy at every supermarket. We ate a cold lunch in the middle of the day; we didn't have the time or the opportunity to heat it up.

Kaffircorn was grown in Japan to feed the cattle. Originally it was imported from South Africa. I don't know whether the cows liked it but we didn't like it at all. In my opinion it tasted disgusting but after the war we were told that this kind of rice was more nutritious than normal rice. It contained proteins and minerals and it probably helped us to survive.

For dinner we had soup that was made of sliced up turnip and kelp seaweed. It wasn't a delicacy but it was warm at least and that helped to keep you warm especially in winter. We also got a small piece of fish for dinner or a few calamari rings that tasted like fishy rubber. The fish was delicious and turned the combination of rice and kaffircorn into a tasty meal. Later on in the war fish became scarce as many fishing boats were lost.

Our officers complained to the commander of the camp that we didn't get enough food. The response we got was that our hunger was due to the fact that we swallowed our meals way too quickly. We got the order that we had to chew every mouthful 200 times. If we would do that, then our hunger would disappear! Up to today people often make the remark: "Oh man you are such a slow eater."

About the end of 1943 soy beans were added to our dishes. To make soy beans digestible they need to be cooked for a long time but our Japanese cook didn't find that worth it so we prisoners didn't get many nutrients from the beans. In order to have something extra to eat we tried to trade with the Japanese at the dockyard. Leather belts our own possessions such as watches, rings, dog tags and souvenirs were all of particular value expressed in the number of rice balls. One rice ball was about as big as a clenched fist.

Trading with the Japanese was risky. You couldn't come back to a trader that didn't keep his promises. A friend of mine traded a leather belt for one rice ball per day for three weeks. But after five days the Japanese man was gone. I always preferred transactions in exchange for one rice ball, such as doing a small job for a Japanese man so he could hide to get one hour's sleep in the double bottom of the ship.

Another opportunity for extra food was behind the kitchen where the Japanese sat on benches to have their lunch. Rice was boiled in large copper drums and often there was a burnt crust left in the bottom of one of those drums. These crusts were scraped out and thrown away over a low wall half a metre high. You could crawl for ten metres so that the cooks wouldn't be able to see you and then you could put as much as you liked of the crusts into your pockets and crawl back. You had to be quick or the stray dogs arrived there first. The "krah" as we called the crusts were of variable quality, sometimes it was really burnt but sometimes it was alright to eat even though it was a bit crunchy and crumbling.

On our daily march between the wharf and our barracks we picked various sorts of weed that was growing alongside the road. We tried to cook this on the wharf in cans that we put on the little rivet ovens. We thought that this way we could eat some extra veggies. But none of the weed, not even with the largest imagination, tasted like some kind of veggie that we knew. Some men claimed that they got diarrhoea from it, no wonder. I was convinced that God created all the greenery along the roads for rabbits, little marmots, goats, cows and horses – but not us.

One day a cat wandered into the camp. It was caught and killed and the next day the pieces of meat were cooked and fried on the little rivet ovens. It turned out that it definitely wasn't worth it - it tasted terrible.

The side of the wharf was also a good spot to find something edible. If you were lucky, you could find an onion, potato or carrot washed ashore. Onions were usually still edible; the salt water hadn't affected them.

After the first few months we had a big surprise. All prisoners were given some sweet cakes. To all the hungry men it tasted delicious; it was like "manna" from heaven. Every two or three weeks we got a distribution of these cakes. I don't know who was responsible for this. Perhaps it was part of the soldiers' supplies of the army or maybe it was supplied by the executives of the wharf for our work as labourers. But for us it was an extraordinary treat, the only sweet as part of our poor rations.

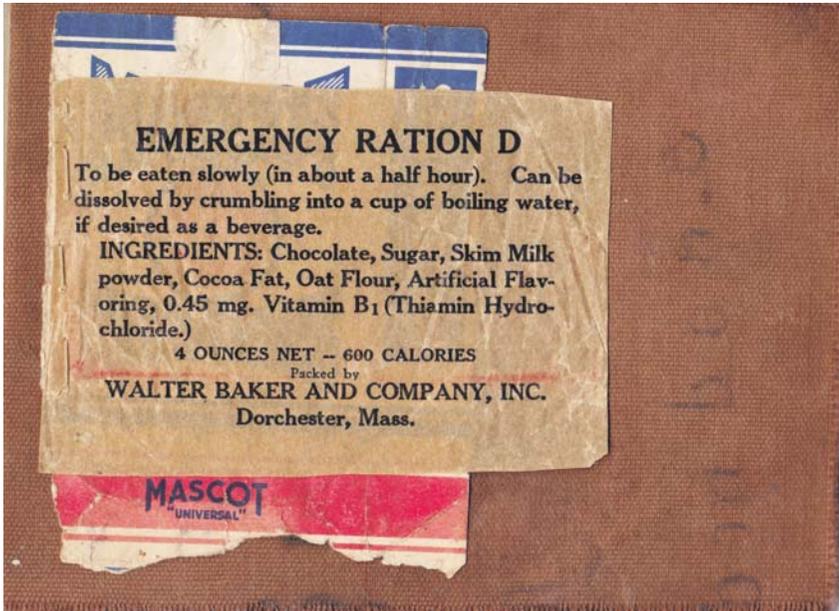


Paul kept the empty cigarette packets to write on the inside. He bound it together and managed to maintain this diary through his time as POW

These cakes were also used by prisoners for intensive trading. Many men were willing to sell their share in exchange for cigarettes. Every week each of us received a packet of Japanese cigarettes. Of course that was not enough for "heavy" smokers. They always tried to get extra cigarettes though all possible means. The cake ration was one of the ways for them to exchange cigarettes for this treat.

Cigarettes took the place of common money. With money we couldn't buy anything but cigarettes were a good substitute. Even if the Japanese had paid us with Yen as salary there was no chance to go shopping. All value was determined in terms of cigarettes. Food,

clothes, extra work, you could sell everything. If you had saved three packets of cigarettes you were a rich man. Those that didn't smoke had the big advantage that they could always buy extra food from other prisoners or from the Japanese on the wharf. Cigarettes for the population were also rationed. Dedicated smokers were sometimes so desperate for a cigarette that they sold a share of their meal.



A chocolate bar wrap

Like the fluctuation of the gilder, the value of cigarettes also fluctuated. Only this fluctuation was much larger. Just after the weekly distribution of a packet of cigarettes to every man, one bowl of rice cost five cigarettes but at the end of the week or beginning of next week, particularly when the new distribution was delayed you could buy the same bowl for one cigarette.

I quit smoking and traded my cigarettes for food - usually with the Japanese, their food tasted so much better. I was fortunate to be able to quit smoking; I felt pity for the real addicted smokers. When there was a large shortage they walked around the wharf looking for cigarette butts. They took out the tobacco and using a few cigarettes butts and a bit of toilet paper they made a new cigarette. I cannot imagine what that tasted like.

A few times during the summer we got three or four cumquats, a sort of Japanese plum. That was such a surprise that I have never forgotten. It tasted good and that fruit also had vitamins of course. Our diet was deficient in vitamins, especially B and C. Deficiency of vitamin B caused beriberi that made your feet and legs swell up with fluid, so that you couldn't wear shoes. Deficiency in vitamin C caused scurvy. The gums got red and started bleeding and you could wobble your teeth in your jaw.

The only medicine for this was dried 'tjابه' which contained much vitamin C. 'Tjابه' came in small and thin little bottles that we bought from the shipyard workers. You sprinkled a little bit of the contents over your rice and with much effort and pain in your sore mouth you ate the meal. But it was worth the effort as a few days later the scurvy disappeared. The dried 'tjابه' really was a 'miracle drug.'

Another problem with our food was the deficiency of salt. The Japanese also had a shortage of salt so the prisoners just had to do without it. The result of a salt-free diet is that you have to go to the loo every three hours also during the night, because the body can't retain the water. But the resourcefulness of prisoners of war has no bounds. When you evaporate enough salt water, salt remains.

The little rivet ovens were ideal to boil salt water and it didn't take long for all the teams of prisoners to put a half litre tin on the fire to evaporate sea water. At the end of the day it was possible to scrape one matchbox full of salt out of such a tin. There was a lively trade in the camp, everyone wanted to have a bit of salt. It did not take long before the Japanese chiefs figured out what these tins were used for. To our surprise they made large steel drums and using a crane they were put on top of big ovens filled with sea water and they too started to produce salt on a large scale.

Our diet was also fat free. We never got any meat, we did not have any butter and nothing was fried in oil, so there was no chance of any fat in our meals. But in mid 1944 we had some luck. In the section where the lathes were put they started to use 'katjang oil' the ground nut oil used by the fitter and turners previously mentioned. However the best source of fat was the Red Cross packets containing tins of butter.

Fukuoka regularly received food packets for prisoners of war. Unfortunately most of the boxes went to the Japanese camp guards. I can remember well how we marched into the camp, tired and exhausted, on a cold, miserable winter's evening with the Japanese soldiers sitting near the gate, laughing with Red Cross tins in their hands,

praising the quality of the contents. We didn't get any of it – even though it was meant for us.

A few times during our war imprisonment we did get something from the Red Cross. Usually it was one packet for four people. That was quite a problem. One bar of chocolate is easy but how do you share a tin with meat and vegetables? Some wanted to eat it all immediately and some wanted a little bit each day. Every group of four found their own solution. In any case, a distribution from the Red Cross was always good for morale. We hadn't been forgotten! The Red Cross also sent us medicines and bandages but these too were usually taken by the guards.

Chapter 7

Translated by: Naomi van Loon

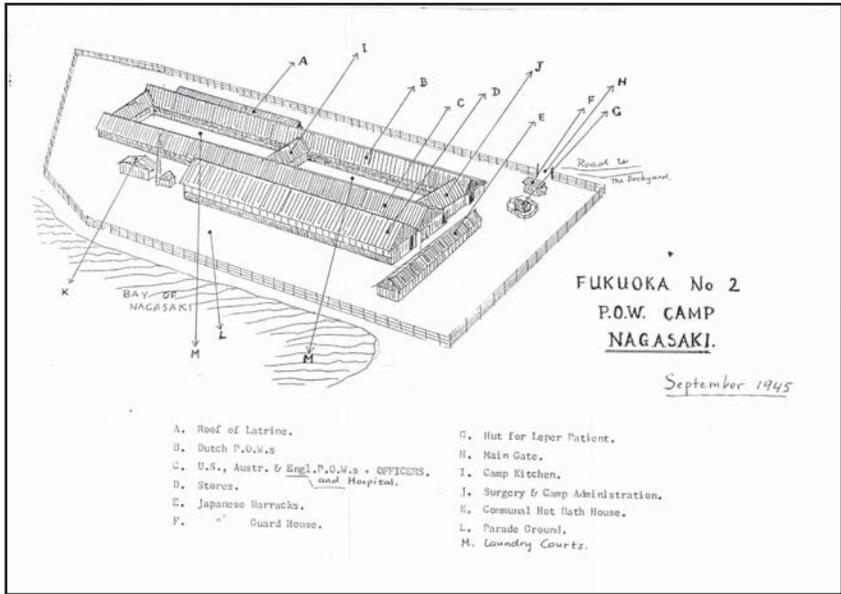
Medical care

The medical care for POWs in Camp Fukuoka No. 2 was in our experience very primitive. It included a sick bay - one room with forty beds intended for men who were very ill. The patients lay on wooden shelves on two sides of the room in rows of ten, in a lower and upper deck arrangement.

In extraordinary cases POWs were treated in the Japanese hospital used by the Japanese who lived in the barracks near the shipyard. Broken arms and legs were put in casts there and the heavily wounded were taken in too. A few of us had appendix surgery in that hospital and were taken back to camp as soon as possible as the Japanese were always scared we would escape.

The camp hospital cared for the men who had caught pneumonia and recovering wounded who had survived accidents on the dock. The patients had extra blankets and the nurses tried to make their lives easier and cheer them up. Medication for the patients from the Red Cross was locked away by the Japanese and very little was handed out.

The only medicine to cure pneumonia was a yellow powder: 'Danginan'. Our officers saw the opportunity to get a supply of this life-



Fukuoka no 2 POW Camp Map

saving drug by trading expensive objects like jewellery and watches with Japanese civilians. This was a very risky undertaking but it saved my life.

Early in November 1942 I caught pneumonia. We had arrived in Nagasaki in October and we had not yet learnt the art of keeping ourselves warm. The whole day we had worked in the rain without a rain-coat. It was freezing and I was trembling like a leaf in my wet cotton jacket. In the middle of the night I awoke shivering with a high fever.



Shushin You may lay down the tag must be displayed and worn when going to the doctor or the toilets

The sick, drawing by Don Moore

My comrades carried me to the hospital. I can't remember much of it except that I just couldn't get warm despite the extra blankets.

My best friend Jan van Hulzen told me later that I was delirious with high fever but thanks to the 'Danginan' the doctor gave me I got better. Every day Jan would come to feed me in the evening although I had no appetite whatsoever. But he gave me the best treats of his own rations in exchange for the largest part of my own meal. That helped to keep me alive.

The hospital was a sad place. One night

they brought in an English POW with pneumonia. The whole night I listened to his rasping breath until I finally fell asleep. The next morning he was lying next to me, dead. These kind of memories one can't ever forget. After hospital I got ten days off work. I was allowed to walk around the camp but in accordance with Japanese policy I had to wear a sign around my neck with Japanese letters indicating I was on the 'sick list'.

Then it was back to the filthy, smoking, sooty shipyard I had been away from for three weeks. I can still remember that in the time before the war survivors of pneumonia were sent to a sanatorium in the mountains for at least three weeks and often took months to recover fully. POWs were treated differently. It is no wonder I still have visible scars on my lungs in X-rays.

The sickbay was for external patients. Many would go early in the morning for a declaration that they were unfit for work. Complaints were mainly diarrhoea, high fever and bronchitis. A Japanese doctor and a translator were always present and they suspected every POW as a malingerer trying to get a day off. For instance, one would have to have a fever higher than 39 Celsius before returning to the barracks. Often our own doctor would protest and argue with the Japanese doctor without any results.

There were always some men with infections, boils and skin diseases. The lack of soap or the possibility to wash oneself and walking around in clothes that could be washed just once every three weeks (without soap), were all reasons so many of us suffered from these ailments.

The worst aspect of it was that the nurses and doctors had no ointments to treat boils. The only treatment was a purple permanganate solution and a few rolls of bandage. The gauge bandage was cut in long, one centimetre-wide draws and was then used to put in the holes of the boils after the doctor emptied them.

Boils had to be treated in the morning and evening. The doctor had no scalpel but he used the half of a pair of scissors. The tip of the scissors was beaten flat and then sharpened to make for a sharp knife. We had no anaesthetics and the nurse, 'Pa Janssen', would give us a pillow to scream into. Then he would say: "Shout as loud as you can pal it will help sedate the pain and you'll feel better with it."

'Pa Janssen' really felt for his patients. He was always concerned about our wellbeing and his efforts to lighten our pain were much

appreciated. He was a great joker and he was popular with everyone. One of his known comments was "I'm sorry boy but I have to be cruel to treat you well, here's the pillow."

He treated me for a full week when my buttocks were full of boils, as a result of a beating with a baseball bat by a Japanese marine guard. My civilian boss had given me up as a spy, after he caught me showing my comrade POWs some photos of American fighter aircraft I had found in a newspaper in the toilet. For the rest of my life I will remain disappointed in 'Okano-san', my Japanese boss. He was a Christian and so far he had treated us better as POWs than many other Japanese bosses. I suppose he must have thought he did the best for Dai Nippon.

The result of such a beating was always severe bruising of the buttocks. All colours of the rainbow appeared. Because of the bad health condition we found ourselves in, our bodies could not heal from such wounds, resulting in boils and abscesses.

I became an external patient in the sickbay and stayed in the camp for a few days. My pain would not ease whether I was lying on my back, my side or on my belly; it was all torture. Exhausted I had a few hours of sleep every now and then. But thanks to the treatment of 'Pa Janssen' I survived. I often wonder what happened to him after the war. He was a special man worth at least an 'Order of the Orange-Nassau' honour.

One benefit we experienced over the POWs working in Indonesia, Malaysia and Burma, was the absence of malaria. Moreover, we were regularly vaccinated against cholera, typhus and dysentery because we were in contact with Japanese workmen. They were not concerned for our health but they wanted to prevent their own people getting infected through us.

Feet-eczema was another huge issue for many POWs. At the docks we would often have to stand with our feet one centimetre deep in water. With old shoes or boots full of holes there was no chance at keeping our feet dry. Of course there was no shoemaker and everyone tried to keep his shoes usable with pieces of cardboard, sailcloth and such.

Dirty, unwashed, wet feet in old shoes were ideal for eczema in the summer and some boys were put on duty in the camp on bare feet, so they would not have a chance to heal.

In winter, apart from pneumonia, bronchitis and influenza, we also had another issue: winter-hands and winter-feet. Without gloves it was often difficult to keep hands warm. The Malaysian and Indonesian boys, in particular, often had to deal with winter-hands. For generations they had lived in the tropics and they probably did not have the genes to protect them from this ailment. Their fingers would swell up and in some cases it was so bad that they had to be spoon-fed, because they could not hold their own spoons. There was no sulphur-ointment and the only source of sulphur was the urinals in the toilet block.

We worked twenty days and then we had one day off. The highpoint of that day was the bathing house. The bath was an oversized 'mandi bak' (bathing tub) about a metre high and there was space for about forty men. The reservoir was filled with salt water heated by the kitchen steam pipes. There were 26 rooms in the camp so if your room was the last, the colour of the bath water was quite different.

There was a roster, so that each room had a chance of clean water. The men on duty in the bathhouse had to remove, after each group, the brown foam on the surface of the water. They used long, wide poles for that. It was always a pleasure for us to go to the bathhouse especially in winter. All the dirt would soak off and the penetrating heat and hot seawater gave a delightful feeling of wellness.

The Japanese doctors noted that we would very often easily catch a cold. They did not understand that the cause was insufficient food and clothing. They thought of a way to improve our resistance to the cold. Everyone got a small towel and during the evening call we had to spend ten minutes to rub ourselves warm with it.

On Japanese orders we had to undress our upper bodies and ten minutes long the guards walked up and down the hallways, to ensure that we followed their orders. That happened every day during the cold time of the year. The Japanese were also getting sick of it; they'd rather sit in the warm watch house than walk around in the draughty halls of the barracks. When there were no Japanese in sight, we used the time to kill the lice in our shirts.

Compared to the Burma railway we lost a lot fewer men. As far as I can remember about 75 people died from a thousand POWs. Most fell victim to pneumonia and several committed suicide by electrocution or by jumping off the highest dock building. They couldn't bear the misery any longer. One American was beaten to death.

I am not sure how many people regained their good health after the liberation. I am still surprised how my weight increased from 44 to 65 kilos in the three subsequent months I spent in Manila. The American army rations were incredibly good and I believe was one of the reasons I am still in good health.

Chapter 8

Translated by: Jaap Frederiks

News and Sabotage

‘Sabotee! Sabotee’. That was what Bokoku cried out when something went wrong or when something unusual happened. Bokoku was a Korean, a kind of sergeant-major of our guards. He was convinced that we were doing all we could to sabotage the Japanese war effort. But this was barely an issue for us. Why make our lives even more miserable? Bokoku did not see it this way.

During a blackout in the evening he would dash in with his torch trying to identify who had caused this. When the steam kettle in the kitchen broke down he did his best to find out who was to blame. He could see ‘sabotee – sabotee’ everywhere. He was sure we were hiding a radio somewhere in the camp. Often when we worked at the docks they searched the whole camp for it.

He did not realise we got most of our information on the state of the war from Japanese newspapers. Although none of us could read Japanese, we did recognise the maps of the Pacific and of South East Asia. The graphs on the maps illustrated the allied losses in ships and fighter planes because the news was all about Japanese successes. But it was clear to us that the battles were being fought ever closer to Japan.

At first the fighting was in New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Coral Sea, Guadalcanal and the like but with time it moved into the Philippines, Guam, Wake, Midway, Saipan, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. We knew enough to know that when the allies could operate out of Okinawa they could reach Japan with bombers and that later proved to be the case. And you can imagine how excited we were we learnt about D-day in Normandy from the papers at the latrines.

Bokoku did not know that we had two Chinese Malay servicemen who could read Chinese and therefore understood a good deal of the Japanese articles. They provided us with a lot of news. After the war had ended the Japanese commanding officer asked our chief officer: 'Now that the war is over, could you please tell me where you hid the radio?' Though we never had a radio, our chief officer replied: 'It was hidden in the kitchen chimney'. The Japanese believed us; because that indeed was the only place they never had searched.

A few times during our first months in Nagasaki we received English language Japanese newspapers. They were full of propaganda. They had well-oiled propaganda machinery. The Japanese people were fully convinced that Japan would win the war. Even after heavy bombardments at night the workers at the wharf told us how many aircraft had been downed that the enemy had suffered a bitter defeat during the air raid.

These Japanese papers had anecdotes about courageous soldiers. I remember two of them that struck me as exceptionally odd. The first one related a near collision of two battleships at sea that was prevented because a courageous navy man had jumped in between the two ships and used his body as a buffer. The ships did not sustain any damage and could stay on course toward imperial victory. Imagine: two 45,000 ton battleships bouncing off a human body!

Another anecdote related to a dogfight between a Japanese Zero pilot and his American enemy. The American pilot was very clever and managed to dodge each attack until the Zero pilot ran out of ammunition. When the American fighter came at him to finish him off, the Zero pilot opened his canopy and threw a ball of rice at the approaching aircraft. Both planes skimmed the ocean waves and when the rice spattered out across the American's windshield, he lost vision and crashed into the water. The Zero pilot returned to base to refuel, take on fresh ammunition and was off to find new targets. Japanese fighters never lost a battle. Everyone in Japan believed this but we naturally knew better.

Back to sabotage. There was hardly an opportunity to sabotage anything at the docks. We were in a unit with Japanese workers. If you did not do a proper job they would beat you up with a cane or a baseball bat. Worse still, you had to escort a Japanese foreman to the nearest sentry block and had to watch someone being tortured and beaten up with a bat.

Twice I had the opportunity to do something when we were working in the engine room of a nearly finished cargo ship shortly after its launch. We were sent in for the final cleaning of the deck, stairways and railings, ahead of the final handover. Once I did it with cement. I filled my pockets with dry cement that I had stolen at the wharf. In the engine room I unscrewed a steam pipe, filled it with cement and closed it again. I don't know if it ever caused any problems but it felt good and made me feel proud. On another occasion I filled the oil bath of the main bearings of one of the steam engines with metal scrap. Again, I have no idea if I caused any serious damage but it kept my spirits up.

Probably the most effective and annoying manner of sabotage was with lice. We slept in flea and lice infested cabins and decided we should share our poor sleep patterns with the Japanese sailors who were to man these ships. These awful creatures would bite you everywhere during the night. I usually knew a day ahead of time where we had to work, especially when we had to clean the ships' new sleeping quarters. In the evening I would fill a matchbox with all the lice and flees I could find and plant them in the sailors' cribs the day after. I could see the lice crawl in between the cracks and spaces and I knew they would find their victims who would be sleeping there soon. I knew well it would be near impossible to eradicate lice from a house or a ship.

I now realise that the true victims of my sabotage actions were young men who had not joined the war effort onboard a cargo ship by choice either, who in the end had a fair chance of being the subject of attacks by torpedoes and bombardments. They probably had no choice. The Japanese imperialists controlled all aspects of daily life. They were mobilised to die for the Emperor or to contribute to victory for Japan.

You might think that we did not care at all for the Japanese workers with whom we worked all day. But this was not the case. A number of them did not want to be at the docks either. They had no choice and they understood the same applied to us. A strange kind of solidarity arose between us.

Perhaps this is the reason why the POWs once rescued some 20 Japanese workers from drowning. It happened in a dry dock where four 10,000 ton ships were being built simultaneously. This dock was 10 metres deep and had a concrete floor and concrete walls. A large caisson closed it off from the sea. This caisson was basically a big concrete box that could be filled with sea water. When the ships were ready to be launched the dock would be filled with sea water. The caisson would then be emptied, allowing it to float and be towed away by a tug boat. This opened the way for the ships that would then be moored alongside the quay for the final phase of construction.

One day - no idea why - the caisson gave way and a 10 metre-high wave flooded the dock. The water lifted the half-finished ships off their blocks. They floated for a few minutes and then sank to the bottom of the dock. Many workers went down in the wave, fell off the scaffolding and got crushed underneath the ships. The ones working in the ships also found themselves caught in metres of water. Fortunately none of the POWs got killed. Every one of them managed to swim to the edge of the dock.

But it turned out that hardly any Japanese knew how to swim. Then something amazing happened. The POWs jumped back into the water to rescue as many Japanese as they could. I wonder how many of them are still alive. I am sure they will remember this. Two days later the whole camp had to be present at a special parade. All POWs who had participated in the rescue actions received a bag of candies, a bottle of lemonade and a glass of dried 'thabeh' in recognition and appreciation. In his speech the Japanese commander said: 'By saving the lives of these people you have proven you are members of a first class nation'.

Chapter 9

Translated by: Jaap Frederiks

Keeping the Faith

Often former POWs are asked: How did you manage to survive? What kept you going? Did you never give up hope? There were several reasons but mainly we remained convinced that the Japanese would lose the war and that we would be rescued and liberated by the Americans. Many men wanted to go back to their wives and children; young men wanted to see their parents, brothers and sisters again. There was a strong belief that there would be a better future.

There is a saying: there are no heathens in the trenches. We can add: in a POW camp everyone believes in God. It was a great support to be able to submit all our suffering in a prayer to God. It is kind of difficult to explain if you have no experience of it yourself. It is something one never forgets.

But there were other reasons. The support of and for your mates was essential. Everyone was a friend to you. When you got sick or injured, you could rely on them. Nobody was alone. If you got desperate, there were always your mates to cheer you up and keep you going. If you gave up thoughts of going home one day you were bound to die.

In the barracks the mood was always upbeat especially after a good meal at the end of a day of hard work and poor weather. At least there

was a dry spot to sleep, despite the bugs and lice, snugly together with your mates under one blanket, keeping each other warm. We all had only one blanket but if you slept closely to your 'sleepy' mate, both of you would just fit under two. We would both sleep on one left or right side and regularly turn around so that for part of the night your back would be nicely warm.

Each winter we lost weight. We had to find a small cushion so our hips would not get scratched on the wooden floor boards. It was perfectly natural that all men slept together. It was necessary to survive and nobody thought about sex. We were all impotent because of malnutrition; sex was not an issue at all.

We talked a lot about food, about preparing delicious dishes. We exchanged recipes or wrote them down on the scraps of paper we had. A diary was not allowed but the Japanese let us write down these dishes. Somehow speaking about food made hunger bearable. At night you would dream about the dishes and drool on your pillow.



Nagasaki shipyard, photo: Australian War Museum

Our faith in an American victory got a lot stronger when early in 1944 we saw our first six B-29 bombers over Nagasaki in broad daylight. They were at 30,000 feet because Japanese ack-ack (anti-aircraft fire) only reached 25,000 feet. That evening there was a massive excitement in the camp. Bombers over Japan meant that the country was within reach of the US Army Air Force. But it also meant that Nagasaki and our camp could be the target of bombardments.

There was no POW sign painted on the roof of our buildings. That only happened after the war. So there

was a big risk of getting hit. We hoped the Americans knew there were two POW camps in Nagasaki. After the war we heard that they did indeed – nonetheless they dropped the second atomic bomb there. POWs were expendable and could be sacrificed.

Increasing scarcities on the wharf also told us the war was not going well for the Japanese. There was less and less of everything: lubricants, acetylene and oxygen, cement, gas cylinders, copper pipes and steel sheets.

The composition of the work teams changed substantially during the last part of the war: fewer young workers, more women and early 1944 the first groups of school boys and school girls arrived. They were barely 14 years old and had to leave school to serve the Emperor and contribute to the victory of Dai Nippon. Two of the young boys ended up in our team.

Even we as POWs felt sad that these children were being drafted.

They had been in schools in the wider Nagasaki area and were supplied with green and blue suits and housed in the lice-infested barracks. They had to work long days and their food was as bad as ours. They were guarded to make sure they would not flee home and were beaten with a cane when they did something wrong. It was terrible to see how badly the Japanese authorities treated their own children. But that was what Japan was like during this imperialist war-waging regime.

The Japanese had a well-oiled propaganda machine and so the Japanese people strongly believed in ultimate victory. They were prepared to sacrifice themselves for it and it justified all their suffering. On the wharf the workers were frequently treated to political speeches and pep-talks but in addition there was always the threat that more effort was needed. These gatherings were invariably concluded with three loud "Banzai" cheers.

Once in a while a group of sumo wrestlers visited us. They walked around just to show off their strength. They would lift by themselves a pole that could only be carried by four ordinary men. This was to inspire the common workers. We also had visits by Kamikaze pilots. These brave men were prepared to sacrifice their lives to the Emperor in suicide operations. After their pilot training they received a week's leave. Then were sent to the frontline with their fighter plane filled with explosives and crash it into a US navy ship. During the last six months of the war these suicide pilots inflicted more damage on the American fleet than it had suffered in the whole period thus far.

These heroes came to say goodbye to the men they had worked with at the wharf. They were honoured and celebrated in every respect. Everyone had to bow to these pilots and all military staff had to salute

them even the most senior officers. The director of the wharf himself accompanied them during the tour. Each pilot walked around freely, with a small group of admirers carrying a Japanese flag and head scarf. His closest mates could paint their names in black on the flag.

This was a huge honour for a Japanese citizen. You could not tell the whole thing was basically a sad event. The chosen pilot laughed all the time and greeted his friends in a passionate way. It made you wonder if they really meant it. They were fanatics hard to understand, because their very existence was proof positive that they were losing the war. No one resorts to mass suicide missions if viable alternatives exist.



Japanese Guards by Don Moore

But if anyone realised that they didn't say so and these visits were a big event at the wharf. They were an inspiration to work even harder. With heroes like this it seemed inconceivable that Japan could lose the war. Surely there would be setbacks but in the end the glorious victory would be theirs. But we were unconvinced. For us it was a clear sign they were getting desperate and doing their utmost to turn the tide.

Early in 1945 things became more and more evident at the wharf. Up till now we had built seven 10,000 ton freighters in about three months. But because of the scarcities it was taking longer and we were wondering how many of the ships would be sunk by the US bombs and torpedoes. Perhaps the Japanese Government was thinking along similar lines. They decided the POWs in Fukuoka No. 2 would be more use in the coal mines and in April 800 POWs were sent to Moji where conditions were a lot worse.

The attitude of the guards got worse as well. For the least offence you got kicked or beaten sometimes with the butt of a rifle. The Americans in particular got a hard time. Singing and whistling was not allowed.

We were no longer allowed to sing to 'keep up spirits' in our barracks but on the wharf itself we still sang out loud. No one could hear it because of the noise of the hammers on the steel sheets of the ships. It really helped to sing the many songs we remembered from school.

The Japanese we worked with remained convinced they would win the war. After each bombardment they would proudly report how many planes had been brought down, that soon the Americans would run out of planes and the air raids would stop. We knew better than that; we were seeing larger numbers of B-29 bombers flying over Nagasaki to targets farther away and they came more often too.

Everything indicated that the end of the war was near. We could not guess how it would end. Surrender, an invasion and capture of Kyushu? It worried us that they had put machine guns at the four corners of the camp positioned so that they could only fire inwards toward the camp. We did not know that they had decided to kill all 47,000 POWs in case of a US invasion. The atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were to save us from this fate.

Chapter 10

Translated by: Marleen Honig

A special occasion

Winters in Nagasaki could be quite severe. On one occasion a howling blizzard with hail and snow was impeding work at the shipyard. This was especially hard on POWs who had to work outside the buildings in the open air and were suffering from the cold. The icy cold north-western wind from Siberia numbed all POWs. All the buildings were unheated and had a constant draft. It was hard to stay warm without woollen sweaters or warm underwear. On days like these bronchitis and lung infections were very common.

The ovens used to heat rivets with red hot coal fires were very popular. Friend and foe alike would regularly warm up in front of one. POWs with sadist bosses were being put to work outside in the raging wind. I was lucky with a boss who hated working outside in the terrible weather. He usually looked for chores to do in and around a ship that was under construction.

The weather could not have been worse on one particular day in Nagasaki. At the end of that day as we jogged back to the camp the mood was rather good amongst the exhausted workers. There was a sense of great expectation. Within twenty minutes we would be back at our barracks, away for the terrible weather. The temperature in our small rooms would increase from the presence of around 40 men.

But there was something even better. Most of us were looking forward to a very special meal. This one evening we wouldn't go to bed hungry. We would start dinner with the usual cup of 'air raid' soup, a plain soup with barely any ingredients: 'all clear'. If you were lucky, the soup contained piece of beet or seaweed but you had to be very lucky. Even so, the soup was hot and it warmed you.

Then followed the main course: normally just a small bowl of rice and kaffir corn. This time, it would be different. We would complement our meagre rations with cans from the latest Red Cross food packages. My sleep buddy ('slapie'), Jan van Hulzen, with whom I shared two blankets during the cold winter months, had a can of 'Spam' and I had a can of cheese. We also had a chocolate bar for dessert. We had traded a pack of Chesterfield cigarettes for it also from the Red Cross package. Yes, this was going to be a very festive meal - after all it was Christmas day 1944.

Throughout the entire day I had been thinking of Christmas times at home. Was this going to be my last Christmas? I didn't feel I could last another year; I was so skinny and could not endure much more. At home I would go to church with my parents and my sister and then we would feast on all the treats of Christmas dinner at home. The church was always filled and I used to admire the Christmas tree that was decorated with colourful and sparkling, shiny balls, silver stars and (the authentic) burning candles.

I was often looking out, expectant to see whether there was fire. There were always buckets of water and a mop next to the tree so that we could extinguish any fire. I paid no attention to the sermon but sang along with the songs. I really enjoyed it; it was the most beautiful part of Christmas to me.

My mother's Christmas dinner was also something very special; turkey, marzipan and nuts. Throughout the day, I had a lump in my throat when I thought of the treats. In my mind I had this picture of the white damask tablecloth with red ribbons, spread across the entire table, and red candles in silver candlesticks that shone light on our cheerful faces.

When I sat down on the hard benches amongst the other POWs for our special Christmas dinner I had to think of those happy days. Almost everyone had saved something so we could celebrate Christmas in a special way. It was delicious and with our tummies filled the mood was excellent. However there was one thing we all missed very much; we

weren't allowed to whistle or sing. The Japanese camp commander thought the war was too serious for singing. We all thought that was very sad.

At the shipyard, between the thundering noises of the riveting hammers we sang really loud, that was safe, no one could hear that but we were too afraid to do that in the camp. When the guards would hear anyone sing everyone in the room was punished by standing at attention for hours outside. The Japanese often collectively punished us. The Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs was not signed by Japan, they didn't acknowledge it.

Even on this Christmas Eve we were not allowed to sing. But our officers, Dutch, English, American and Australian, went up to the Japanese commander and explained to him that Christmas was a very special day for all the POWs. He listened and at last he said unwillingly "Alright, if you want to sing Christmas carols you can do so at night but you all have to line up at the parade ground at eight o'clock and you cannot bring blankets. That is not allowed". Of course he knew the weather was terrible and didn't think we would take the offer.

The message spread through the barracks, from one room to another and at eight o'clock that night almost all POWs left their rooms for the dark parade ground. We stood there with our backs against the howling wind with sleet on our faces. We didn't stand in rows but as a group of penguins, close to each other for warmth, surrounded by Japanese soldiers, who cursed and abused us for they had to be outside too.

First we sang a Dutch Christmas carol, then an English one, followed by an American and an Australian one. Something miraculous happened. The Holy Spirit came down on us. Even the Japanese guards became quiet and listened. The Japanese enjoy group singing and they also felt something very unusual was happening. Jesus said: "If two or more people come together in My name, I will be there too". The mood was electric there in Fukuoka No. 2. Even the Japanese felt it. We ended our singing with "Silent Night". We sang it in two languages together, Dutch and English. It sounded impressive. Never in my life would this song be more beautiful than that night in Nagasaki, 25 December 1944. The most wonderful thing was that God and Jesus were there with us. Never in my life have I felt so close to a higher power and felt so blessed.

For the rest of my life I will never forget this and the memories of this occasion will always be a blessing for me.

Chapter 11

Translated by: Marleen Honig

Bombardments

At the start of 1945 it became apparent that the war was not going well for Japan. More often there were delays at the yards, due to a shortage of supplies. The quality was not getting better either. The coal we used for the heating rivets contained lots of rocks and sometimes there were no coal at all, leaving no work for the rivet teams. There was a shortage of oxygen and acetylene; drills became blunt quickly and were fragile; grease was almost unavailable and copper pipe for the engine rooms turned up weeks too late. The situation got worse by the month for the directors.

To keep up the spirit amongst Japanese workers, they had to turn up earlier to their shift so the government could assure them about the ending of the war; eventually they would win. The yard was still being expanded. The new docks could host four 10,000 tonne tankers and ore ships at a time. The buildings (five stories tall) on each side of this gigantic dock were finished with walls between concrete pillars. This dock was used after the war to build 100,000 tonne tankers and ore ships.

The mood of the Japanese population was surprisingly good. When we would talk with others from our team, they would brag about how many ships the Americans were losing. They didn't know the Americans made a lot more than they lost!

The percentage of boys and girls taken from classrooms to work at the shipyard was increasing as more men were mobilised. But the Japanese propaganda was excellent; newspapers printed plenty of heroic stories of the military forces, even though there was one thing they couldn't hide: the increasing number of air raids and bombings on Japan.

Na 21 Juni. 19 1A

Boeat
 Werk op de werf wordt nog
 minder. ^{dari} A 54 te water

A 55 in t dok stop gezet
 Diepe dok ernstige stagnatie
 geen zuurstof.

Leeste drie weken i avonds
 steeds bakjes van Boko.
 Pannen, timmerhout, balen
 ijzer enz. enz.

Komplexen nogal rustig
 tot ontrekks half juli
 Diks sloot in jop. Balen in
 de schuilkebler

Bombardementen: Nogal
 waer eind Juni. Betrekkelij-
 ke rust begin Juli, maar dan

Notes from diary after 21 June 1945

After the excitement in our camp of having spotted six B-29 bombers over Nagasaki in full daylight for the first time in 1944 it took weeks before we saw the second formation. But in 1945 it happened much more frequently. The formations got bigger too. The pounding sounds of the four-engine "Super Fortresses" caused panic in Japan. Even we were asking ourselves when Nagasaki would become a target of a bombing.

In July we spotted various great formations flying over the yard towards Sasebo, the large navy base in west Japan. An unbelievable sight, three waves of 27, each made up of three groups of nine bombers - in total 81 B-29s. They flew over unperturbed out of reach of the

anti-aircraft artillery and fighters. Hundreds of thousands of people died during the bombings across Japan. In fact, we learned later that more people died in the air raids before the atomic bombs were dropped than from the two bombs themselves.

In comparison to other cities, Nagasaki was not hit as often until the final, total destruction of the city by the atomic bomb on 9 August when in one flash 74,000 men, women and children died and another 19,000 died later due to burns and radiation.

We did not know where the bombers had come from but we understood that the Americans had taken over various islands, close enough to Japan for strategic bombing. In the spring of 1945 the yard was attacked during broad daylight to the consternation of the Japanese and the POWs. Low-flying aircraft attacked the yard with machine guns and bombs while we hid behind concrete walls and pillars and underneath steel plates.

To have survived as a prisoner of war for three and a half years only to be killed by allied fire right before liberation was not a pleasant thought. My best friend, Jan van Hulzen, who was working on an open field next to the large dock during the attack found two bomb fragments. He picked them up when they had cooled down and took them to his room at the camp. He gave me one of them and in a strange way I was content with it. It was like a symbol and promise of our liberation. "We are on our way to get you out of there", is what that piece of metal on the shelf above my bed said.

There were various anti-aircraft posts around the yard in the hills of Koyagi Island. The military men on these posts became more vigilant and were now ready to shoot. At one point a seaplane flew low over Koyagi Island around the area where the yard was. It was very apparent that the plane was Japanese with its distinctive red circles on its fuselage and underneath its wings. To our surprise and amusement, the Japanese started shooting at their own plane: it was just unbelievable. They missed their target but everyone, friend and foe was surprised. Maybe they thought the plane was a camouflaged American aircraft.

The incident didn't end there. About an hour later two trucks arrived with soldiers and officers at the yard. The crew of the anti-aircraft post were lined up and abused by a hysterically screaming officer for minutes in front of all personnel and POWs. Then, each one of them was bashed ten times with a baseball bat. They hit them as hard as

they would hit us for so-called misdeeds. It was remarkable that the POWs got to see and hear it all. It also proved how crude, strict and cruel the Japanese military discipline was.

One day one of the ships we had built at the Kawa Minami yard came back with damage to its upper and bridge deck. It was a boost for us. The ship had multiple holes and torn plates. We couldn't determine whether the damage was caused by bombings or by gunfire but for us this was proof that freighters could not rely on the protection of Japanese warships.

The shortage of various supplies even steel plates became so severe that the Japanese decided to use us as slaves elsewhere. As previously mentioned, at the end of April, 800 were relocated to a colliery without notice. Later we heard that the conditions there were a lot worse than in our camp. I was lucky. I stayed in Fukuoka No. 2, in Nagasaki, where only 500 men remained.

The worsening situation in Japan meant there was increasingly less fish available. I am not sure whether too many fishing boats were lost or whether too many fishermen were called in for service with the Navy but we got less and less fish with our poor meals.

The soldiers in the camp and the navy personnel that guarded the shipyard became more combative and even the slightest breach of rules was harshly punished. They even made up mistakes to justify beating a defenceless prisoner of war. Suspicion was enough reason for punishment. They often asked: "Oranda? Englisi? Ameriko?" They had degrees of retaliation. The Dutch were punished less severely than the Americans, as the latter was the nation from whom the Japanese suffered the most.

Perhaps they had lost family members in the Pacific or during the bombings over Japan. This was their chance to take revenge. The Dutch were considered a second class military. They had surrendered after the fall of Java on 8 March 1942. The Japanese thought the Dutch ought to have fought to the death for Queen Wilhelmina. The long-standing connection between the Netherlands and Japan through the times of the Dutch East Indies Company in Nagasaki could also have played a role.

Some guards were worse than others especially when they had been drinking. They walked around the camp looking for reasons beat someone. A reason could be to stand at attention not stiffly enough

whilst saluting; walking outside the room without a hat on; a smile on your face; whistling and so much more essentially trivial behaviour.

Besides individual punishment, we were also often punished collectively; sometimes the whole room, sometimes the entire camp. I remember well how our room had to stand at attention for six hours. As usual, the reason was trivial. Outside every room stood a container which was filled with sand to put out firebombs. One night a person on his way to the latrine apparently thought he wouldn't make it to the toilets and used the container of sand instead.

Unfortunately that container happened to stand outside our room and 'Bokoko', the camp's sergeant major thought that one of the guys from our room was the culprit. No one answered when he asked who was had done the deed so he told us to stand at attention outside our room until the 'guilty' one came forward. We were sure it was not one of us but Bokoko was convinced otherwise – and he was in charge.

We were already very tired from working all day at the yard but stood there for hours. Long after midnight, when some men started to collapse, one guy said, "I'll step forward and say I did it, that way you guys can go to sleep". It was very brave but we didn't want to hear of it. Nonetheless he stepped forward and Bokoko marched him to the guardhouse to give him a beating.

But, to our surprise, half an hour later our hero returned, untouched. During the interrogation the translator, Mr Budding, had explained that this man had sacrificed himself without being guilty. To everyone's surprise Bokoko thought this was very brave and let him go.

One time the camp was punished with a smoking ban. The guards would walk past rooms, searching for scents of tobacco smoke. On another occasion, someone stole tubers from the garden the Japanese had planted to grow fresh vegetables. When that was discovered, everyone was sent to bed without an evening meal.

Sometimes I wonder how many of the Japanese camp guards knew anything about their government's plan in case of landings by the allied forces. According to documents discovered after the capitulation, all 47,000 prisoners of war were to be killed. It had been decided that our camp would receive poisonous injections when the allied forces made a landing. And if panic broke out, the remaining people were to be killed by machine gun fire. After this massacre, the camp was to be set on fire.

Thankfully for the POWs, the abrupt ending of the war after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved our lives.



Nagasaki shipyard, photo: Australian War Memorial

Chapter 12

Translated by: Frans Bloemsma

The ninth of August

The weather was beautiful in Nagasaki. During summer the days often had a blue sky and a light wind from the southwest blowing clouds slowly along the sky. My shift that day was in the big dock working on one of two 10,000 ton cargo ships. The keel had already been laid a month earlier during the so-called "Shinto Ceremony" which we could watch only from a distance. All the Japanese labourers were blessed too but we were not included; maybe they believed we would bring bad luck to them.

The bottom of the ship, which stood on wooden blocks, was now ready to be assembled and we were standing on the concrete floor of the dock waiting for supply of the first steel beams for the bulkheads. A crane was positioned to lower them to ground level. Everything was quite normal with no hint of what was about to happen.

Then, after a Japanese person(with a watch) informed me it was eleven o'clock, we saw a blazing bright flash of light. The best way to describe it is to compare it with the effect of facing a photographer's flash bulb at close range. We looked up and I saw a white ring of light moving through the blue sky at an incredible speed. We wondered what could have caused this phenomenon. Was it a short circuit of

electric power? A short circuit happened now and then with great blue sparks and lightning. But that hadn't happened - the electric cranes were still working! So what was it?

Suddenly all hell came down. A strong, warm wind blast hit the shipyard with great force. Even though we were below ground level in the dock, we felt the heat coming from the point where the atomic bomb had detonated six kilometres away. The shock wave of the bomb - which moved with a speed of 500 metres per second - was so strong that all the windows and walls of the five-storey buildings of the dock were blasted away and came down with a deafening noise.

The damage was enormous but we survived for two reasons: we were in the dock 10 metres below ground level and we ran to shelter under the steel bottom of the ship before the avalanche of debris arrived. The debris completely damaged everything in the dock. A stifling cloud of cement dust surrounded us. When the avalanche stopped we decided to leave the dock as soon as possible as we thought the bombing was still going on and the door at the end of the dock, between the ocean and the dock, could be hit. If that happened and the door was breached, a 10 metre-high tidal wave would enter the dock giving us no chance of escape.

This had happened before and we all knew the danger should it happen again. As soon as possible we ran to the 10-metre ladders placed against the walls of the dock. The Japanese labourers also climbed out of the dock and we all ran to the air-raid shelters and tunnels in the rocks surrounding the shipyard. The distance was only about 100 metres but before we could reach the safe tunnels we were already breathless as we were all half-starved. At that time my weight was only 44 kilograms and the other prisoners were all much the same.

As well as coping with the blast from the bomb we had to look out for, American fighter-bombers which had previously bombed the shipyard. It seemed a bad idea after surviving three years of POW camp to be killed by your allies and we scanned the skies for low flying fighter-bombers. There were none to be seen but suddenly I saw something incredible. A huge pillar of smoke and fire topped by a great mushroom was building like a massive super-charged thundercloud and rising high into the sky.

It went higher and higher, maybe thousands of metres, over where we knew the city of Nagasaki was situated. Unbelievably it looked like an enormous volcanic eruption; but Nagasaki was not built on a crater.

What could it be? What had happened? That's what everybody was asking. Everyone at the shipyard, friend and foe alike, stood still and looked at the terrific sight. And then we realised a terrible disaster had happened in Nagasaki.

It did not take long time before the Japanese Navy guards approached us with a lot of swearing and caning and sent everyone back to work again. All POW's had to clean up the debris on the bottom of the dock and as a result I couldn't see what was happening in Nagasaki. However we soon got a good idea of the massive destruction to the city. Sometimes we had to climb out of the dock to go to the toilet. We always went in threes; two as lookouts for allied aircraft and one in the WC-block. By standing on the WC-block sitting board of the toilet we could then see in the direction of Nagasaki. The big fire column with the mushroom cloud had disappeared and the whole city was on fire, lit by the heat of the bomb. Black clouds were building everywhere and the entire horizon had changed into a mass of fire and smoke. We learned later that gusts of wind of more than 100 km an hour were fanning the Nagasaki fire-storm.

At five o'clock in the afternoon we had to gather for the march back to the barracks. On this occasion we had to line up with our backs towards Nagasaki. In the barracks we had to cover the windows with blankets, so we were unable to look outside. But – just like the situation at the yard – they could not prohibit visits to the toilets. To reach them we had to cross the 20 metres that separated the barracks and the toilets. That night I went out twice. The whole sky, even above our camp on the island of Koyagi in the bay was coloured completely red; a terrifying sight.

During the evening, when we were eating our poor meal we had a lively discussion around the question what actually had happened in Nagasaki. Some, who worked on the shipyard, had seen three parachutes with black boxes underneath dropped by a single B-29 bomber which disappeared over the horizon. At that time we did not know that the atomic bomb called "Fat Boy" had been detonated 500 metres above the ground. We were unable to see it because we were below ground level in the dock and other things in the shipyard obstructed our view. This situation undoubtedly saved our eyes from serious damage.

All possible scenarios were considered. Perhaps the boxes contained papers relating to peace negotiations. Maybe the enormous pillar of fire was a fire-storm caused by incendiary bombs dropped by the

B-29. Although we didn't know it, this was a reasonable guess - fire-bombing of Tokyo did indeed create such intense heat that mushroom clouds sometimes formed. Another thought was that bombs had hit the ventilation systems of underground ammunition stores, leading to a chain reaction of huge explosions. At that time we could not imagine that a single bomb could destroy the whole city.

Only on 27 August, almost two weeks after the end of the war, did we learn what had happened. The information came from a USAAF B-25 Mitchell bomber, belonging to the so-called 'Air Apaches'. Three of these aircraft spent some time at low level doing reconnaissance of the barracks and dockyard. I will never forget them: dark green camouflage fuselages with a big red head of an Apache Indian painted on the tail. Free men were in those planes in the air and although we were still imprisoned in that foul camp on the ground the sight of them lifted our spirits.

Quickly we made from blankets the letters "NEWS" and a question mark. One plane circled around, flew at low level over the barracks and dropped a pack of Chesterfield cigarettes, which fell on the parade ground. In the cellophane wrapping we found a piece of paper with the message:

"War is over. Japanese surrendered unconditionally to Allies. Atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki and Russia entered the war against Japanese. MacArthur will arrive in Tokyo in a few days to accept Hirohito's surrender. American troops soon are there to free you. Courtesy of 345 Bomb Group, 500th Bomb Squadron, Air Apaches."

At that moment we realised that at the time we saw that flash, at 11.03 hours on 9 August, the horrible results of an atomic war for human kind had begun. As we later learned, in one second 74,000 men, women, children and babies, all civilians, died. During the next three months, after miserable suffering, 19,000 more victims died as a consequence of the radiation and injuries. Such a tragedy should never happen again. Atomic wars would not be wars between one nation and another; they would be wars against humanity. Nobody can win such a war. We would all be losers!

Chapter 13

Translated by: Henny Spee

The days after.....

On the morning of 10 August 1945, the day after the atom bomb, all the prisoners of war in Camp Fukuoka No. 2 were lined up as usual and made the twenty minute walk to the shipyard. The hot air was grey with black smoke-clouds which swirled up from the direction of Nagasaki centre. It was clear that the people in the city had not been able to quench the fires.

Much later we heard that most of the inhabitants perished when the bomb exploded and that the extreme heat caused a fire-storm that sent everything up in flames. One third of the town was totally destroyed by the atom bomb and the fire-storm burned the rest.

When we arrived at the shipyard that wretched morning the whole routine had changed. All the work on the ships under construction was at a stand-still and most of the Japanese workers were divided in gangs of twenty to thirty. These gangs were equipped with spades, rakes, buckets, bundles of rope and ladders loaded onto two wheel carts. They were evidently rescue teams and soon after went to Nagasaki harbour on ferries. For many of them this was a death sentence, as they went to work in places with high radiation.

The situation soon became obvious when the rescue teams began suf-

fering from radiation sickness symptoms like diarrhoea, high temperatures, nausea, hair loss, bleeding gums and mental confusion. But nobody knew that radiation was so dangerous. I am asking myself how many of these men in the rescue gangs became sick later? How many of them did not survive!

The prisoners of war stayed on the wharf, doing all sorts of jobs, like cleaning, tidying up, sweeping, maintenance of equipment. Luckily, we were not allowed to work outside and as a result were not exposed to radioactivity. We tried to find out what had actually happened in Nagasaki but the Japanese did not know either. It was noticeable that for the first time they were dispirited and scared. Nobody bragged about how many American planes had been shot down. They walked around, clearly shocked by the enormous disaster that had caused so much destruction and had claimed so many human lives.

There were a number of air raid alarms during the day. Everybody ran so much faster than usual to the air raid shelters, the fear being obvious. Each time it was a single B-29 doing reconnaissance flights over Nagasaki to take photographs of the result of the atom bomb. We could also see that there were still many fires in the town but fewer than the previous day. Nearly all districts were burned out.

Later in the afternoon we saw the first rescue teams return. It was a pitiful sight. They shuffled with heads down, silently along the road, black from soot and ash. They were still very much stunned by all the misery and overcome by the horror they saw of victims dying and burned to death. They brought in the first wounded who could still walk, to be treated in the small wharf hospital. Most of them suffered horrible burns on their arms and heads. We thought those people had escaped from burning houses and factories; later we heard that it was caused by the scorching heat of the bomb.

Towards the end of the day we were marched back to the camp. The soldiers were extremely mean minded and we had to be very careful not to give cause for a beating, a kick or the butt of a rifle between your ribs. That night and also the following few nights, there was no air raid. I imagine there was nothing to bomb - after all Nagasaki was totally destroyed, wiped off the earth.

The next few days the routine on the wharf was the same for us and the Japanese were sent away as rescue teams. Many more victims also came to Koyagi Island. The hospital halfway between our camp and the wharf was obviously very busy with rows of wounded waiting for treatment.

During the day the air raid sirens wailed many times and we all ran for the nearest shelter: some tunnels in the rocky area on the border of the ships' wharf. In the tunnels I stood among survivors of Nagasaki on their way to the hospital. I could see the burns and other wounds close up. It seemed that clothing, head scarves and hats had protected them from burns. Many had unusual blisters that reminded me of the coloured pictures shown to us by the boatswain at our first military training about the results of mustard gas.

Two cases I will never forget as long as I live. Next to me stood a small Japanese woman carrying her baby in the traditional manner, wrapped in a shawl on her back. Her arms were burned but her face was untouched and her head scarf had protected her hair. When the bomb detonated she probably stood bent over in the vegetable garden while she worked but the baby's little head outside the shawl got the full impact of the heat on her face. It was transformed into a blind, black, horrible mask. But worst of all that poor little child was still alive and she cried and cried. How much did that mother suffer? I hoped that the baby died very soon, saved from the pain.

On a second occasion in an air raid shelter I stood next to two young men. One seemed unhurt but his friend was in a bad way. His whole face was burned and his lips were totally mutilated. His shirt had a big hole on his chest and the skin on that spot was also burned. He wanted to smoke a cigarette but he could not hold it in his mouth. His good friend knew how to solve that problem. Every now and then he blew a mouthful of smoke into the mouth of his mate who inhaled it eagerly. It was easy to see that he enjoyed the cigarette smoke in spite of his pain. We all admired this man who looked after his friend so well, a merciful Japanese Samaritan.

There was one section on the wharf where they were working frantically. The carpenters made hundreds of wooden boxes, ten centimetres square and twenty centimetres high. Those were used to store the ashes of cremated family members on a small altar in every Japanese house. For us onlookers, it was proof that many people in Nagasaki had perished.

One morning, a few days after the bomb, we suddenly heard a low flying airplane. To our great astonishment it was a Japanese sea plane. This was the first time that we ever saw a Japanese plane above the wharf. We asked ourselves what that could mean but we didn't find out then and still don't know.

One evening when we returned to the camp after a day at the wharf there was great consternation at the seaside of the camp. A couple of corpses had washed ashore and the soldiers on watch were arguing excitedly about what to do. Finally, they pulled the corpses ashore. Later on we heard that hundreds of victims had jumped in the water to escape from the scorching heat of the bomb. Those who landed in deep water and could not swim drowned.

After the bomb the days on the wharf went very slowly. The ship building stopped and we were given all sorts of jobs to keep us occupied. Most of the POW teams lost their Japanese bosses who were sent to Nagasaki for rescue work. Supervision on our jobs was minimal and because there was so little to do, the time went slowly. So we were bored on the twelfth, the thirteenth and the fourteenth of August. We heard all sorts of rumours, especially on the fifteenth of August when sirens sounded throughout the day and the following night. That was

1945
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16 Augustus

is Morgen weg aan koming
van thuislijven; regeling van
in werkyasemi
Waar geen luchtalarm.
Gevuelten en tekenen:
Ziekenboeg kantje regt:
"Boem, boem finish
Japan riktten faetmaal

Loose page diary August 14 15 16

very unusual but the Japanese on the wharf and in the camp did not say anything and even if they knew what was going on they did not tell us.

Then, suddenly unexpected, with no warning, on the sixteenth of August we did not have to go to the wharf. The camp commander declared a day of rest for the Prisoners of War. Was it the end of the war or was it some sort of Japanese feast day? We did not know and no one told us. The whole day and night no alarms went. We became very excited but not always for the same reasons. The pessimists predicted that the whole of the camp would be transferred to a mine but the optimists were sure that at the very least an armistice was due. But nobody could be sure because the blackouts in the camp were still maintained.

II

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17 Augustus

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stand in de vorm van
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Rode Kruis barang.

August 17

A new surprise on 17 August. We stayed home again, with no march to the wharf. Another day of rest according to the Japanese camp commander. That had never happened in the three years that we had spent in Fukuoka No. 2. An airplane flew over the camp but there was no alarm, no screaming soldiers, no anti aircraft fire. Rumour in the camp had it that one of the soldiers had said that since the 15 August the war had ended. Could that be true? Many were reluctant to believe it out of fear of later disappointment.

But when the Japanese suddenly gave our officers all the Red Cross food parcels they had stored for their own use we understood that the war was over. The excitement in the camp was unbelievable. That night all the rooms were filled with singing. Our belief grew that in spite of all our hardship, hunger and diseases, we had survived. Soon we would be able to return to get on with our pre-war lives.

We had no idea that for many of us our circumstances would be changed totally. We thought of our parents, brothers and sisters, wives and children. In all those years of imprisonment we had had no contact whatsoever. It was a wonderful, indescribable feeling that we would soon be liberated.

The next morning we were woken in the usual manner by a trumpeter who sounded the Japanese reveille. But this time there was also something different. A Dutch sailor played the marine reveille and the Japanese guards did not hinder him. Our world had definitely changed much for the better. But to our frustration we still had no official announcement that the war had ended. That happened on the 20 August.

Chapter 14

Translated by: Sjak Draak

The last days in Nagasaki

On 20 August 1945 our officers finally received an official letter from the Japanese commander of the camp to inform us that the war was over. The Allies and the Japanese had agreed to cease fighting. The letter didn't mention the "unconditional surrender" that had been demanded by General Douglas MacArthur. But it did refer to "how tired we must be after years in a prisoner of war camp and how happy we would be to see our families again". They promised to organise a journey home for us and asked our cooperation in maintaining order in the camp until we could be liberated.

Our officers told the commander of the camp that they themselves would take over the command. Morning and evening roll call became our responsibility and the guards were only allowed to patrol outside the fence. No more lurking and threatening eyes of the Japanese on us anymore. What a relief! All Red Cross medicines the Japanese had confiscated were to be handed over to us.

To our amazement our personal belongings were returned to all of us, like watches, golden rings, fountain pens and pencil holders. In October 1942, when we arrived at Nagasaki all these items had been confiscated. We had to fill out a form on which every item was men-

tioned but we never expected to see our belongings again. It was quite a surprise to see my Parker fountain pen (a gift for my 18th birthday), my silver pencil holder (for my 19th birthday) and my Hohner mouth organ again.

It didn't take long before the first adventurous prisoners of war ventured outside the camp although they had been warned it could be dangerous. The concern was that the population would take revenge against members of the enemy people who had won the war. But what happened was the other way around - the Japanese people were afraid that we would take revenge on them because of the way we had been treated in the camp.

They didn't know we weren't about to do that; we had often seen the population itself being treated ruthlessly by the Japanese authorities and didn't blame the ordinary people for our treatment. What we were looking for was food, good food, not revenge. But on the island there was nothing. Everybody was hungry. To find food we had to cross Nagasaki and go into the mountains, where little farms were to be found.

Groups of prisoners requisitioned boats to ferry across to Nagasaki and went through the heaps of rubble to make their way to the mountains. On the farms, in tiny houses they found little old men and scared women and children who were happy that their lives were spared in exchange for a full stomach. None of us wanted to harm these poor people, who had also suffered four years of war. The harsh conditions we faced weren't their fault.

When our boys returned to the camp they told us of the dreadful devastation of Nagasaki. It was one big heap of rubble in which everything was incinerated with an awful stench of human and animal bodies that weren't buried or cremated yet. The only things standing upright were the skeletons of concrete and steel buildings. The heat of the bomb had been so intense that the sand on the tiny beaches of Nagasaki had turned into glass. To prove this, some brought back pieces of glass of about 10 by 10 centimetres as a souvenir to the camp. Roof tiles had been baked and glass bottles had melted under the intense heat. Unfortunately these souvenir hunters did not know that these roof tiles and the glass were probably highly radioactive. They also didn't know that walking around in Nagasaki was dangerous because of the radioactive contamination danger. One of my good friends, who had sold a piece of glass to a souvenir hunter in Okinawa for 200 American dollars, died 20 years later of leukaemia.

While my comrades were walking around freely and had the opportunity to go to Nagasaki, I was stuck in camp with a severe abscess in my left foot. The foot had swollen because of beriberi and felt very painful. I could only walk on crutches. The wound was treated every day in the sickbay with new bandages and permanganate but it didn't look good. I felt unfortunate at the time and thought I was unlucky not being able to get out and about like the others but in hindsight the abscess saved my life. By keeping me in the camp it kept me away from the radioactive contamination in Nagasaki that seriously shortened many lives.

While we enjoyed our relative freedom we couldn't understand why it took so long before we were liberated. After a week there was still no sign of a ship in the harbour. Not far from camp there was a hill that gave us a good view over the sea and the harbour and our officers organised a roster for scouts. But nothing happened. Day after day passed and it was only on August 27th two B-29 bombers and two water planes passed low over the camp. Later in the afternoon the Air-Apaches arrived with three B-25 Mitchell bombers. I wrote about them earlier.

The morale in camp went sky high. "They have discovered us, we will be picked up in a few days" we thought. After four days a wondrous event happened. The camp was bombed, not with bombs but with 95 pallets, full of packets of delicious food and clean clothes. They came down, hanging on coloured parachutes. A wonderful sight, those giant low flying B-29 bombers with four engines and with open bomb bay doors and with the text "P.O.W.-supplies" painted under their silver wings.

Not all parachutes opened and some packets crashed to the earth but the cans with food and the clothing weren't seriously damaged. Many parachutes came down outside the camp and the Japanese civilians ran as hard as we did to collect the loot. They returned some stuff to the camp but I am sure they kept some for themselves. The silk parachutes were also collected. We couldn't make use of them but a few days later we saw Japanese children walking around in red, yellow, green and blue dresses.

The contents of the packets were stored in the camp and distributed among the prisoners of war. That evening there was a feast in the camp. The rooms were filled with smoke from the Camel, Chesterfield and Lucky Strike cigarettes and we enjoyed the delicious food and the chocolate. But for many the sudden change in diet had

serious consequences. For three years we had eaten fat free food and our stomachs couldn't cope anymore with fat in these quantities. Cans with butter and cheese worked as laxatives and we were warned by the doctor not to use more than one spoon of butter a day.

Although the temptation was great to eat too much from these delicious cans of food, we had to learn to eat slowly in small quantities. Two of our camp comrades had a very unpleasant experience that nearly cost them their lives. Although we received the order to turn in everything that came down from the skies to the kitchen they had kept one can for themselves. On the label it stated "dehydrated rice and beef" with an instruction for use. They couldn't cook the contents so they tried the contents raw. The dry salted meat tasted wonderful and the two of them emptied the whole can.

No more hunger how lucky they were! But then they became thirsty and they drank many cups of water. This aggravated the situation as their stomachs inflated and they suffered terrible belly aches. When I returned to sick bay for my sore foot those men were lying as pregnant women with nurses rubbing their bellies and pushing their full weight on their stomachs to prevent them from bursting. Luckily they both survived this but it made us cautious of all this delicious food.

On 2 September 1945 the command of the camp was officially transferred by the Japanese to our officers. We were no longer prisoners of war. The guns and ammunition of the guards were handed over to us. Now it was our turn to take prisoners of war. We wanted to lock up some of our guards as war criminals but they had run off and were only later to be caught and tried.

Sergeant major Bokogu was sentenced to eight years in the Sugamo prison. The sadistic chief of the kitchen Yagoheiji Iwata received 12 years for the torture and mistreatment of defenceless prisoners of war. The camp commander (a Christian) who held command during our first year in Nagasaki was acquitted because of the better treatment we had received from him. The Japanese authorities had probably thought of him as too humane and replaced him by a far more gruesome officer, who in the end also was imprisoned.

On 3 September we were visited again by B-29 P.O.W.-supply bombers with more food and clothing. Whole rooms in the camp were stacked with food packets. Clothing was distributed and we all received new trousers or shirts. It became clear to us that it was dangerous to stay outside during the airdrop, because many parachutes didn't open. As

far as I can recollect nobody was injured but there was quite some damage to the buildings. A 44 gallon drum filled with cacao powder hit a wooden two-story building. The parachute didn't open and the drum went through the roof and crashed onto the concrete floor in a big brown cloud of cacao dust. Eye witnesses told me that everything was covered with brown powder! We decided to stay in the air shelters during the supply drops.

On 8 September came the next bombardment by a B-29. This time 114 parachutes with supplies were dropped. The bomber made several runs over the camp. An incredible sight all these brightly coloured parachutes with delicious goods that came floating down. Much of the clothing was totally unnecessary, woollen blankets and long brown winter coats, battle jackets and woollen sweaters, all in the middle of the summer. But they were useful in trading with the local Japanese population.

But we grew impatient. Already a month had passed since the bomb had destroyed Nagasaki and we were still in the camp, sleeping on wooden planks between fleas and lice. We had won the war; the Americans knew where our camp was, so why didn't they come to get us? We wanted to return to the free world. What stopped them? We wanted to leave this mess. Why couldn't they get in touch with us, to inform us what the future would bring us? The answer to that question came on 11 September when a landing craft with American sailors in bright white uniforms landed near the camp.

Chapter 15

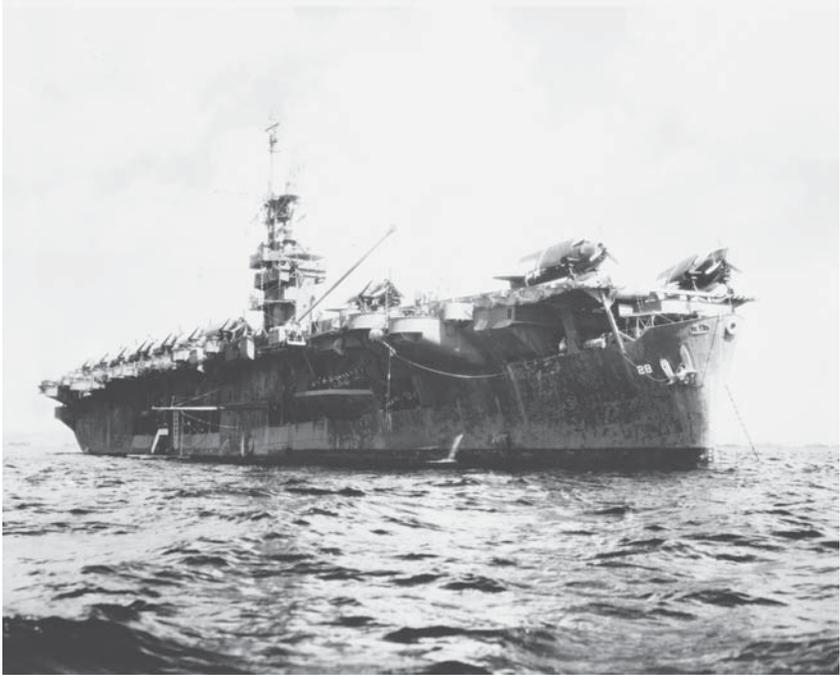
Translated by: Annemieke Ruigrok

Liberation at last!

On the morning of 11 September 1945 an American landing craft arrived unexpectedly at the seaward side of our camp Fukuoka No. 2. Part of the bow came down and marines and sailors in clean, shining white uniforms entered the camp at the double. The reaction of the prisoners was unbelievable. The great day of liberation had finally come. There was a sense of triumph and relief: hardship, hunger and misery, we had survived them all. For many it was too much having to deal with all emotions. I have never seen so many men crying. The intense happiness and the realisation that now we could let go of all the tension simply overwhelmed us.

It was a wonderful sight to see those fit, healthy, energetic sailors walk around, straight-backed with resilience in their step. It was then we realised that for us after these years as prisoners of war walking had turned into a miserable shuffle with bowed heads so as not to draw the attention of the guards. Now we too could walk with heads up and backs straight.

The Yanks shared cigarettes and chocolate and asked all kinds of questions. Next we were ordered to go to our rooms for a full inspection, to enable the American scouts to get a better idea of the condi-



**USS Chenango 31 Aug 1945 at anchor in Buckner Bay, Okinawa.
Photo: National Archives**

tions in the camp. One of the officers who visited our room stayed for only 20 seconds and said, as he left: "Goddam, you guys stink." We had grown accustomed to that smell but his nose couldn't tolerate it.

News came that the next day we would be picked up by landing craft to transport us to an aircraft carrier nearby. Orders came to leave everything behind, including the new clothes we had received through the air drops. We were allowed to carry only personal belongings and jewellery that the Japanese had returned to us at the end of the war and a Bible or one book.

During the last night in Nagasaki we didn't sleep much. We sat up chattering, excited, about the future. What would happen now? What were our plans for a new life? What had happened with our families? Were our fathers and mothers, wives, fiancées and children still alive? By dawn we were exhausted and went to sleep for the last time on the hard boards with lice.

That morning a number of landing craft arrived, steered by sailors smoking big cigars. We thought it was a funny sight. Room by room we

were loaded and with everybody standing every boat was fully packed and we left Korari Island. It felt great when our boat with the engines at full power turned backwards from the waterside and set course for the harbour.

There another big surprise awaited us. We were dropped at the quay in Nagasaki and saw a very long row of green canvas tents. That's where we had to go and soon found that it was a de-lousing and cleaning centre. At the entrance everyone had to hand in his personal belongings in a small bag bearing his name. That way my book, mouth-organ, fountain pen and pencil case were fumigated, together with stuff that belonged to others.

We then had to undress completely and all clothes, shoes and caps went immediately into a large blazing furnace to be burned together with the fleas and lice in them. After that we walked naked into the tent. Everyone received a big bar of soap and we walked under a long row of warm-water showers, soaping and rinsing as we went. What a luxury for us, what a delight! The first shower in three years - and with fresh water at that, soaping, showering, soaping, showering, soaping, showering, encouraged throughout by American attendants.

At the other end of the tent we received beautiful white towels and as soon as we were dry the towels were collected and tossed into another burning furnace. We thought it was a pity - what a waste! But the Americans took no risk with us dirty prisoners of war. After that we entered a second tent with sick bay staff in white coats. Taking turns we walked past a long row of hairdressers with trimmers. Although we all had bald heads there was a lot of work to be done. Beards, moustaches, arm-pits and hairy chests, arms and legs, everything was cropped and shaved.

After that everyone had to go under the showers again with delightful warm water and plenty of soap taking care that no stubborn lice were left behind on our bodies. When we had dried ourselves again we thought that this was the end of the cleaning. But no, still naked and completely bald, all of us walked into a next tent where we had to walk past a long row of masked male nurses armed with DDT-sprays. To everyone's great amusement all hairy parts of our bodies were sprayed. We came out of the tent looking like white ghosts.

The last tent gave us a sensation we have never forgotten. American quartermasters gave us fresh clean fitting clothes. What a luxurious feeling; white pants, a white singlet, a blue shirt and a pair of jeans,

NAME	PAUL COUVRET	RANK	CONSCRIPT-SAILOR
SERVICE	DUTCH NAVY	SERIAL NUMBER	25122-D
CIVILIAN		NATIONALITY	DUTCH
SEX	MAN	AGE	23
CITIZENSHIP	N. E. I.	STRETCHER CASE	
PHYSICAL CONDITION (GOOD, FAIR, POOR)			
NAME OF SHIP EMBARKED ON		Chenango	
BILLET NUMBER			

Boarding card for Chenango, Nagasaki 13 September 1945

white socks and new shoes. Because I could put on only one shoe – my other foot with the abscess had swollen too much- I was given a small cotton bag to keep the second shoe!

Upon leaving the last tent American Red Cross girls stood there waiting for us with a mug of coffee and vanilla ice cream. It's something I will never forget – what a delightful surprise! Ice cream we had dreamed about for years, we were feasting on it. Seeing the beautiful girls was something special too – that also we hadn't experienced for years. To us they seemed like little angels.

They were very helpful and because I had to lean with one hand on my crutch, one girl kept standing by my side to assist me with the coffee and the ice cream. She felt such pity for me that she started crying. That made a big impression on me; the fact that another human being felt so much for me. For years after I exchanged letters with Mary Lou from Washington.

After we had retrieved our personal belongings it was time to embark. We went on landing craft to the 'Chenango' that lay at anchor a few hundred metres from the quay. It was a large freight ship that had been turned into an aircraft carrier. It had taken part in the landings

at Leyte and in the Philippines and was now being used to evacuate prisoners of war from Japan.

When we came alongside the Chenango we had to climb up using scrambling nets. Because I couldn't do that with my lame leg, I thought this would become a big problem. But then a giant black American sailor came down, at least 2 metres tall who said with a broad smile: "Come on buddy, on my back, put your arms around my neck and I'll take you up." That way he climbed up with me like a little monkey on his mother's back.

As soon as I was on deck two male nurses took over and carried me to the sickbay where my foot was treated and dressed. There I also got an injection with the new miracle drug – 'penicillin'. I reacted very well to it because one week later – and daily treatments – I could walk again like I used to.

Late in the afternoon we departed destination Okinawa. First we went to the mess for dinner. Were we ever surprised by the large choice of all kinds of delicious dishes from which one could choose with fresh fruit and delicious desserts. What a luxury Navy!

After dinner everyone went to the hangar deck, where the crew gave a Jazz concert with Benny Goodman music and a very appropriate song that was made famous by Bing Crosby: "Don't fence me in". Then followed an address by the Captain of the ship who certainly did not prove to be an admirer of Japan. He ended his speech with the words: "Japan is a country where the flowers have no scent, the women have no beauty and the men have no honour".

The short voyage to Okinawa – where they were busy preparing for the landings on the Kyushu Isles – lasted for almost a whole week because the Chenango together with many other ships had to make a detour in order to escape a raging typhoon. That same typhoon caused so much damage on Okinawa, that one third of the thousands of airplanes there were destroyed. According to American assessments, because of this the landings in Japan had to be postponed by at least three months. The weather was very bad – the seas were so high and the ship rolled so badly that no one was allowed to go on the flying deck. If you liked a wild sea, it was a beautiful sight. Many however were seasick and would rather stay in their bunks. The crew took very good care of us; they just could not do enough for us. They all wanted to talk with us about the atom bomb, what happened when it exploded, what we had seen of the damage and the victims. They also wanted to know how we had been treated during captivity.

Finally after a week of bad weather we arrived in Okinawa. We went in trucks to an encampment where we were housed in a special section for prisoners of war. We were free to walk around but we were warned not to go too far because Japanese sharpshooters –hidden in caves and Chinese tombs - were still active. We all received a kit-bag with good quality clothes and looked like regular American G.I.'s.

What struck us all when we went hitchhiking on Okinawa were the endless rows of planes, trucks, tanks, jeeps, graders, stocks of all kinds of material. We asked ourselves how it was possible that Japan had managed to hold out for so long against such a superior opponent. But that's history now.

On Okinawa we met many G.I.'s who were looking for souvenirs. Some of our boys had captured samurai swords in Japan which were worth hundreds of dollars there. But you couldn't let them out of your sight for a single moment or they would disappear. At night you had to go to sleep with such a sword, to prevent theft.

Our stay on Okinawa didn't last long. News came that we would go to Manila on a transport plane. On 23 September 1945 we drove in a truck to an airfield where I boarded a four-engine B-24 Liberator. The pilot was a young American; he told us he was 19 years old. We were sitting in the bomb bay and during the flight he came down to us to have a chat. When he heard I was an aspirant airman, I was invited to join him in the cockpit. There he gave me the controls and showed me how I could stay on course using the compass and the altimeter. For half an hour I flew this four-engine plane full of passengers over the Pacific with the pilot next to me in the second chair, an incredible story but hey, in times of war anything could happen and more than once rules were broken.

We landed safely at Clark Airfield in Manila, an enormous complex with hundreds of parked airplanes where all day and night one could see dozens of airplanes taking off or landing. We were picked up by trucks for transport to one of the many encampments near Manila. All the Dutch were housed in the same encampment. So began three interesting adventurous months in Manila.

Chapter 16

Translated by: Stef Scagliola

Manila

Manila was an interesting place. The inhabitants tried to pick up the thread of pre-war life after the Japanese occupation but the city was heavily damaged. On Dewey Boulevard along the bay only ruins were left of many big buildings and houses. Hundreds of thousands of American military were barracked in big tents camps around Manila



December 1945 in Manilla with Willemse Hamstra and Hakkaart

waiting to be demobilised and returned to the US as soon as possible. They were to be either transported by aircraft or ships. As far as the eye could see the bay of Manila was crowded with war and cargo ships that lay at anchor.

We Dutch POWs were also barracked in tents. We slept on low camping beds not mattresses on the floor. For us, being used to hard planks, this was a luxury. The tents which could each hold 20 men had wooden floors and so stayed dry during rain. Three times a day we would queue in long rows in the mess for excellent meals. We were surprised by the broad choice of dishes at each meal.

The laundry and the open air showers were also very well organised. Everything was clean and well maintained. There were no flies or mosquitoes as every day a Dakota would fly low over each camp and spray DDT. The loudspeakers in the camps would warn us a few minutes in advance. This way we had just enough time to get our clothes off the clothesline.

We enjoyed our freedom - there was no daily roll call and we could walk out of the camp and go almost anywhere. The freedom was immensely appreciated. During our imprisonment we had become accustomed to lining up several times a day to be counted - the Japanese were always afraid we would escape and they would be punished accordingly.

In the camp there was also a PX-shop (post-exchange retail shops on US military bases) where you could buy all sorts of goods. I bought a watch that I kept for 30 years. Once a week six green cans of beer for each man were distributed. This was also highly appreciated as beer was quite expensive and difficult to get. Some boys would sell their cans on the black market in town for a good price but most of us would fetch ice-grit in a bucket freely available at the ice-machine and half an hour later have a lovely cold beer. It was only possible to keep cans for the following days by personally guarding them night and day. Without this provision they would immediately disappear.

There was not much entertainment in the camp. We would play volleyball and the Americans taught us a game with a horseshoe that had to be thrown around a pole at a distance of 10 metres. If you really wanted to have fun, you had to go into town. This was quiet easy as there were always buses, trucks and jeeps that would give us a lift if we stood beside the road in uniform.

I travelled to town practically every day to see all the interesting building styles. Many buildings were from the Spanish colonial era. There were also many Chinese temples. These formed a stark contrast with the modern buildings built before the occupation. In particular, the Roman Catholic cathedral was a strange mixture of styles. It was nicknamed the 'Iron Church', as it was entirely made of metal.

With a drawing board, a box of pencils and sticks of charcoal I would go into town to draw buildings. It would keep me busy for hours, much to the amusement of Filipinos who often made remarks, luckily in their local language. One day a jeep stopped with American officers who were interested in my drawings. When they learned of my certificate in drawing they asked me whether I was willing to teach at the Roosevelt Club.



Drawing woman Manilla 1945

This was a big building with many floors, where American military personnel could engage in a wide range of activities and hobbies. They could watch movies, play music, visit the library and tinker with wood, radios, metal, weaving, painting etc. You could stay there the entire day, as there were cafeterias where you could have lunch and dinner. I would teach drawing lessons once a week to GI's and everything would be taken care of: pencils, paint, paintbrushes, drawing boards, good drawing paper. Even girls in scanty swimming costumes as models.



The Manila Club, American Red Cross Recreation Center, Manila, P. I.

Reproduced by 29th Engineers

Manilla Club Red Cross recreation centre

Teaching was great fun but I soon realised that some of my pupils were far better artists than I was. I organised some outings in the hills in the countryside for my class to learn to draw or paint a landscape or kampong (small village). We were driven to the mountains on trucks with armed military in jeeps in front and behind to protect us from a handful of Japanese snipers who did not believe that the war had ended and were still active along the road.

Chapter 17

Translated by: Jan H. Vonk

The Philippines

We were free but as yet there were no plans to move us on from the Philippines. Knowing this, many of us decided to take the opportunity to do some travel. Hitchhiking by plane was easy. First you went in a truck to Clark Airbase in Manila and there you reported to the operations room. A big board displayed the destinations various aircraft were heading to and at what time. It also showed where the airplane sat on the airbase.

If you felt like flying to a particular place you asked the pilot if you could fly along. Seats were nearly always available. "Sure buddy, hop aboard". In that way it was very easy to fly to other islands of the Philippines but not to the United States. That was strictly controlled. However it was possible to hitchhike to Japan, Hong Kong and Vladivostok without a passport. Japan would be the last place I would wish to revisit. Most of the aircraft were Dakotas but I also flew in a Liberator and a B-25 Mitchell.

During my first trip I initially flew to Nichols field and then on to Tacloban on the isle of Leyte. There I met a Filipino who worked in the administration department of a large American camp. He had his own jeep and in his spare time we went sightseeing along the coast of the

Gulf of Leyte, where the Americans had landed during its recapture from the Japanese. When the GI's in the camp found out I was a member of the Dutch Navy they invited me for a ride in a motor torpedo boat. A truly sensational experience; never in my life had I travelled that fast by water.

They also used the boats to water-ski. There were no water skis but they used wooden mess tables instead. A rope was tied to one pair of legs of the upside down table and the other pair of legs could be used by the daredevil to hold on to when the boat accelerated. How fast it went I don't know but I did not let go since there were sharks in the bay. By shifting weight from the one leg to the other I was able to steer a little. It must have been a funny sight, seeing those torpedo boats frothing in full speed through the waves of the bay of Leyte followed by an upside down table with a man on top of it. I loved it!

In the camp I spoke with an officer who was commanding a prisoner of war camp for Japanese. Compared to us when we were prisoners in Japan, they were treated much better; every day clean clothes, sufficient food, showers with soap and no obligation to work. To them it was the best holiday they had ever experienced.

The only down side for them was the fact that they would have to bear the blame of not having fought to the death for the emperor. Having to explain that when they returned in Japan would be difficult, most of them had already decided to never discuss the issue of being held prisoner of war. The American commander of the camp told me the behaviour of the Japanese was exemplary. Misconduct was being punished with immediate removal back to Japan. Everyone wanted to avoid that.

After a few days in Leyte I flew back to Clark Airbase in Manila. During the descent we saw hundreds of planes on the ground. Now the combat planes were superfluous and there were teams busy destroying them and turning them into scrap metal. On one of the tarmacs two big bulldozers stood opposite to each other with heavy steel plates attached to their fronts. A tractor would bring a combat plane in the middle of them and then they went full speed at each other and the beautiful aircraft were shattered between the steel plates. After that the wreck was removed to make way for another plane. And it went on for the whole day. The Americans called it 'surplus requirements'.

I witnessed another example of it during my stay in the officers' mess of the base at Guiwan on the isle of Samar. I arrived there while hitch-

hiking again. The officers wanted to know all about my experiences in Nagasaki when the atomic bomb exploded. They had organised a dinner night with lots to eat and to drink and I was the keynote speaker. The party was also attended by some ladies from the Red Cross and the Women's Army Corps. A fireworks display marked the end of the party. But it wasn't an ordinary fireworks display like before the war with rockets, coloured stars and fountains of magnesium. No, it was a surplus motor torpedo boat!

The boat lay at anchor a safe distance from the beach loaded with all sorts of ammunition, inflammable materiel and oil. It was set on fire and it did not take long before the bullets exploded in all directions with enormous bangs until finally the burning boat disappeared under the waves to the thunderous applause of the spectators. As one of the officers said: "That's a hell of a way to get rid of them".

Back in Manila I met a girl from the Red Cross who was on leave from Dulag where she worked. She invited me to visit her so I hitchhiked again with an aircraft. At first, I had to go Nichols field Airbase. That Airfield had a connection to Dulag but there was not a lot of traffic that day. It happened to be that only one Dakota was flying there with very special cargo aboard. It was shortly before Thanksgiving Day and the plane was being loaded with frozen turkeys for the traditional dinner for the GI's in Dulag.

I asked the pilot if I could fly along in the cockpit but that was full. The only available seat for me was the small bench near the back door. It provided no opportunity to look outside but it was my only chance. I considered it; the flight would take merely an hour and I decided to get aboard just before the door was closed. That proved to be a big mistake for which I almost paid with my life. I had not realised how cold it would become in the Dakota. The aircraft had been loaded with frozen turkeys and the temperature dropped well below zero.

There I sat wearing my summer-kaki. It was pitch dark, the windows of the Dakota were blocked by the turkeys. I tried to stay warm by shadow-boxing with my arms and making cycle movements with my legs. But it got colder and colder. It was music to my ears when I heard the engines being throttled back for the descent and I at last heard the sound of the tyres on the tarmac. How long would I have to wait for the door to be opened to set me free from the freezer? Luckily, the kitchen cooks at Dulag were already awaiting the Dakota with their trucks ready to load.

They watched with astonishment as a semi-frozen shaking GI fell out of the plane instead of turkeys. They carried me away and laid me down under the wing. I defrosted and soon recovered. One of the Americans, Lee Trevison from Cleveland took pity on me and took me to his tent in the camp. Of course I enjoyed the turkey afterwards during the special Thanksgiving Day dinner in the camp. I became good friends with Lee and we continued to correspond for 40 years.

Back in Manila we kept on waiting to find out what would become of us. All kinds of rumours were circulating; the Army and the Air force would go back to 'our' Indies and the Navy to the Netherlands to take back women and children to our land of origin. There were however only a few Navy vessels and they were not equipped for troop transport. We had to report once a week but it was always the same: "No news men."

The majority of us still did not know what had happened to our families on Java during the war. We had never had contact in Japan. As soon as I had arrived in Manila in September I had sent various letters to the last-known address of my parents in Sukabumi hoping they would still live there or would have returned back. Every week upon arrival of the mail I waited in vain for an answer. I also visited the Office of Missing Persons of the Red Cross where I had left all data on my parents and my younger sister Nel.

At last in mid-November I received a long letter written by my sister Nel. It was a typed letter containing nine pages. *(editor's note: the first page of the original letter and translation of all pages are at the end of this chapter)*

It started like this: "Oh boy, I'm so glad that you are still alive. We had given up on you. It feels like I've received you back from the dead ...". Nel explained exactly what had happened to her and my parents.

On 21 June 1942 in the middle of the night, Father had been arrested by the Kempei Tai, the Japanese military police. At first he was taken to the Piedang jail in Buitenzorg and from there to Tjipinang, where he was sentenced to six years for being a member of an underground movement formed to protect European women and children in the case of a landing by the Allies to liberate Java.

On 16 December 1942 mother and Nel were also detained and they were taken to Kareës, a new quarter of Bandung. In 1943 they had had contact with Father a few times by postcards. They were written

in Malay as the Dutch language had been prohibited. Early 1944 they received the last card: "Slamat 1/1/44, saja selamat". In March of that year he was transferred to the Sukamiskin prison, where he died of hunger oedema on 28 August.

Mother and Nel led a busy life in the Kareës Camp. They taught the children in the camp and that kept them occupied. It was clandestine but nevertheless highly regarded by the mothers of those children. On 17 November 1944 all women and children went by train on a long journey to Ambarawa. Each person was limited to only 20 kilos of luggage. Nel and my mother then returned back to Banjoe Biroe number 10 where they ended up in a prison that was originally designed for a 1,000 detainees.

The building had been rejected due to bedbugs but the Japanese military thought it satisfactory to house some 3,000 women and children. In the camp living conditions were very poor and an increasing number of women died. My mother died on 29 July 1945, two weeks before the war ended, from undernourishment and sheer exhaustion. Nel wrote extensively about the last couple of weeks at her sickbed.

After I had read all that I was mentally completely cut up by it. My whole world fell apart; no parents anymore, no home, no future. During all of those years as a prisoner of war I had been planning for what to do when I returned home. In the endless long hours during which I thought about my parents, I had realised how well they had taken care of me and Nel while growing up; about the many sacrifices they made for us. I had intended to take them on a nice holiday trip, for which I would pay with my outstanding wages of three and a half years.

That was all impossible now. The tragic, sad and horrible end of my parents hurt me so badly, I cried for hours on end, the letter in my hands, reading it over and over again. My friends supported me tremendously and did all sorts of things to cheer me up. They were a big help during those days that proved to be the most difficult of my entire life. "Come on boy, never give up hoping. Life goes on, your parents wanted to be proud of you," they said.

In December the Dutch Royal Navy personnel in Manila Camp had to line up and a high-ranking officer told us the Naval Aviation Service was looking for volunteers to man a base in Sydney. One of the conditions was a high level of English language proficiency. Because I had lost everything, I signed up. I then had to conduct an interview with a

Naval Officer in which he orally examined all applicants. My English was much better than his but I paid careful attention not to let him know and I was approved to leave for Australia.

One famous proverb says: "Even when opportunity knocks a man still has to get up off his seat and open the door". I believe in that. In Manila I took the opportunity with both hands and I never regretted it.

Paul then made his way by military aircraft to Australia. This was no simple task. When the war ended sooner than expected the Allies had millions of people in and around the Pacific who were no longer needed. Along with rescued POWs, these people all wanted to go home and there simply wasn't enough transport readily available to take them. Some took as much as six months to get to less popular destinations but most were moved in just a few weeks once the authorities had re-organised their transport to take people out of the region instead of into it.

As the next chapter tells, Paul began his Australian stay in Melbourne but was soon transferred to Sydney where the Dutch Navy had some flying boats based.

Lieve Paul,

Gisterenavond kreeg ik van meneer Koperberg jouw adres. Jongen wat ben ik gelukkig dat jij nog leeft. We hadden je n.l. volkomen opgegeven. Ik heb het idee dat ik je van de dood teruggekregen heb. Luguber he? Als je begrijpen kom hoe blij ik ben.

Er is heel veel te vertellen en ik heb de hele nacht liggen denken waar ik beginnen zou en hoe. Het is helass niet alles even prettig wat ik schrijven moet. Het zal een ontzettende slag voor je zijn Paul en ik weet uit ervaring dat dit niet te verzachten is en daarom schrijf ik het je zo zonder verdere inleiding. Ik hoop dat God jou ook de kracht geeft dit ware verlies te dragen.

We hebben deze oorlog onze beide ouders verloren. Vader ruim een jaar geleden, Moeder drie maanden terug. Begrijp je nu wat het voor mij betekent, dat jij er nog bent?

Het lijkt me het beste alles wat ik weet zodat er hierover geen vragen meer zijn. Toch Paul, ondanks alles denk ik er dikwijls over hoe Vader en Moeder deze tijd door zouden moeten komen. Ze hoorden hier nu niet meer, ze zouden hier niet tegenop gekund hebben. Ze is het nog een grote goedheid dat ze weggenomen zijn en het is nog zo gelukkig nog dat ze het van elkaar nooit zeker geweten hebben. Tenzij Moeder het gevoeld heeft maar dan heeft ze het van jou toch verkeerd gezien. Weet je dat we jou al die tijd als vrij in Amerika gewaand hadden? Vandaar we nooit naar je geschreven hebben en we hebben ook nooit iets van je ontvangen.

Na de capitulatie zag je Moeder achteruit gaan en Vader ook. Ze waren in een maand vijf jaar ouder. Moeder leefde in een voortdurende onzekerheid over jou en het was zo dat tante Dick Enter zei: "Zeg haar dan wat, zeg desnoods dat hij dood is dan heeft ze tenminste zekerheid. Maar je begrijpt dat deed ik niet."

Th. M. kreeg Paps een telefoontje van haar. Ze had naar San Francisco geluisterd en daar was omgeroepen dat de jongens voor de vliegopleiding veilig waren aangekomen, het laatste transport. En jouw naam was afgeroepen met: "Groeten aan ouders ik kom binnenkort terug". Dit klonk zo geloofwaardig dat wij het met grote vreugde hebben geloofd. Ik dacht dat je minstens als officier-vlieger terug zou komen.

21 Juni de nacht van Zaterdag op Zondag om een uur werd Paps door zes Jappen weggehaald. Hij was n.l. bij een z.g. sabotageclub en die was verraden. Dat wist ik. Mams niet en omdat ik bang was dat ze ons ook zouden verhoren heb ik dat drie maanden voor haar verborgen gehouden. Dat heeft ze me wel kwalijk genomen maar ik ben blij dat ik dat gedaan heb want als ze verhoord was had ze alles gezegd. Ze was erg bang voor de Kempai, niet ten onrechte.

Paps werd die dag geboeid naar het station gebracht en toen naar Pledang de gevangenis in Buitenzorg. Daar mochten we hem iedere Zondag een pakje brengen tot begin Augustus de Jap zei: "Ouvret soedah pigi". Waarheen wilde hij niet zeggen.

Translated by:

Aniek Modder, Gerda Schiefes and her daughters: Ragnild, Arlette and Hedwig

Dear Paul,

I received your address from Mr Koperberg last night. Boy, am I glad that you're still alive. We had completely given up on you. It is like I've received you back from the dead. Weird isn't it? If only you could know how happy I am.

There is a lot to tell you and I've been thinking all night about where and how I should start. Unfortunately it is not very pleasant what I have to tell you. It will be an incredible shock to you Paul and I know from experience that I can't ease the pain and that's why I'll write it to you without any further introduction. I hope that God will also give you the strength to deal with this horrible loss.

We've lost both our parents during this war. Father more than a year ago, mother three months back. Do you understand now, what it means to me that you're still here?

It seems best to me if I tell you everything so you won't have any questions. Truly Paul, despite everything I think about how our father and our mother could have survived this all. They didn't belong here anymore and they wouldn't have coped with this. From that point of view it's a blessing that they've been taken away from us and that they'll fortunately never knew about each other. Unless mother had felt it but in that case she would've been wrong about you. Did you know that we thought that you were free in America for all this time? That is why we never wrote to you and we never received anything from you either.

After the capitulation we could see mother deteriorating and so did father. They appeared to be five years older after only one month had passed. Mother lived in constant insecurity about you and that was why Aunt Dick Enter told us: "Tell her something, tell her that he is dead if you need to, just so she's got peace." But as you can understand, I didn't say that.

Father received a phone call from her in May. She had listened to San Francisco radio and she had heard that the boys going to flight training had made it safely onto the last transport. Your name was called with a message: "Greetings to my parents, I'll be back soon". It sounded very credible and so we believed it with great joy. I thought you would come back as an officer pilot at least.

On the 21st of June, the night of Saturday to Sunday, at one o'clock, father was taken away by six Japanese. Because he had joined a so-called sabotage club and they'd been betrayed. I knew about the club but Mum didn't and I kept it from her for three months because I was afraid that they would interrogate us. She blamed me for it later but I'm glad I did it because she would have spilled the beans if they had interrogated her. She was very afraid of the Kempeitai, and not without reason.

Dad was handcuffed that day and brought to the station and then to Pledang, the prison in "Buitenzorg". We were allowed to bring him a parcel

every Sunday up until the beginning of August when the Japanese said: "Couvret soedah pigi" [has left]. But he wouldn't say where.

We lived in uncertainty till October. Batavia told us that he wasn't there, Buitenzorg also kept that up, until we received a long card from father in October. He was in the Tjlpinang prison and he was sentenced to six years in jail. Sam Koperberg and Bob Mulder got four years, Joop 't Hart fifteen years and so on. Later we heard that father had been kept in the French consulate for months and was questioned every single day by the Kempeitai in the R.H.. But every day he stepped out of there with the same poker face on. Other than that I don't know anything else from that time. We were allowed to write to him as much as we wanted so that usually meant a card every week. Father would write us a long card once a month. So there was a lot of contact with him. Ans brought him parcels each time (cigarettes and soap because anything else wasn't allowed) that way we didn't have to go over there.

I went to see him for three minutes on the 22th of November. Separated by a double wall of wire netting with on his side a guy and on my side a Japanese at the door, we were able to talk for a little bit in Malaysian. It was terrible having to speak Malaysian with dad. But he was still looking good there, as far as possible of course. His eyes were very still and he talked as calmly as always.

On the 6th of December, mum went to see him; she now knew the whole story. Father was so happy for that. He still wrote about it three months later. On the 16th of December we were interned ourselves, so we couldn't visit him anymore.

We had to go to the council's office with a maximum of 20 kilos of hand luggage and a pillow, after which we were interned in a the monastery and then brought over to Bandoeng on Sunday morning the 20st. We arrived in an area called Kareës, on the south side of Bandoeng, near Kosambi and the Grote Postweg. We were brought to a very modern house on a newly laid road, the Galoenggoenglaan.

Three days later we had received front room and dining room furnishing and a bed and a closet, which we borrowed from people that also had to leave their home. We had it good there. The Figdors, Tichelaars (Netteke has died) and Aunt Tine Goebel (also died) helped us to get hold of all sorts of things. Until March we enjoyed lots of freedom. The other people in the house didn't bother us. Which means that there was some trouble occasionally but that happened everywhere. The wife of Hannes Haasman and Leny van Althens with Mieneke came to us for dinner and we would sit together in the evening. Since we had the sitting room ensuite. Our bed was hidden behind a screen.

This was where I started teaching, clandestine, to eight children, for which I received ten guilders each month. We lived very basically so we

didn't suffer much financially. We didn't do anything unwise; you know that, Mum would never do that.

A bowl of corn flour, oats with milk and a sandwich was what we had in the morning. In the afternoon, for 20 cents per person, a portion of rice, a sajoer [vegetables in coconut soup], two sambals, meat, chicken or an egg. That was seriously tasty. In the evening we would have bread again and oh yeah at eleven o'clock chocolate with milk and at four o'clock mum would make kweetalem, ongol ongol, kweeklepom [all sorts of Indonesian sweets] or something like that. She had really started to like that, as well as trasié [fish paste] and sambal batjang on a sandwich, although if it was too hot she would get hiccups.

I had my own vegie patch in Karees with lombok [pepper], tomatoes and oebie [turnips]. Mum would always stare at the lombok and the tomatoes. She could not wait for them to get ripe, that's how much she liked them.

It was the 1st of March when the gate was closed, the "pasar" [market] continued but on the 16th of June the "pasar" was shut down. The "gedekhandel" started but everything was really expensive. [Gedektrade was a kind of black market through holes in the tached fence that was surrounding the camp.] It was not for mum and me to trade like this.

Everything was now distributed, all bad stuff of course. First 200 grams of rice, then 180, 160, 120, 100, 90, 85 and on Ambarawa even 60 grams of rice per day. "Sago bidji, flake, gaplek, - tapioca". Anyway, you probably would have worked down the same kind of list. We always made the best out of every situation. You couldn't get a lot of vegetables in those times. One month would be better than another, you know those periodical improvements every now and then with the Japanese. 20 eggs per month, some butter, 2 kilos of sugar per person, bacon and pork dendeng [jerky].

At the end of July, the mail connections were broken and we became more and more detained from then on. In December we received one more delivery from the post which covered the previous six months, it included two cards from dad. After August he wasn't allowed to write regularly anymore. In May there was another mail delivery with a card saying; "Slamet T/T/44 saja selamat". That was the last message.

It was quite a while later when the Koperbergs and mother 't Hart (now passed away too) received cards from Soekamiskin (Bandoeng) and we didn't receive anything. There was no "Tabeh dari" [Goodbye of] Couvret, which it would normally say. That was when we got the terrible suspicion that something had happened, Mum was even sure about it.

We never received an official notice but when my letter to father was returned on the 19th of September, it contained the message: "Mr Couvret died in Soekamiskin. Return to sender...." This was not even seven weeks after mother died and even though I'd expected it, it was still a difficult moment.

Sam told me that father had been sick for a month or two, he

had hunger oedema but that he'd passed away slowly and hadn't known completely that it was the end. Sam wasn't very clear in his story but I'm expecting to hear from him one of these days. Because Koperberg has told me that he's got a message for me and that he'd write. This is all I know so far about father.

Freddie Friet also spent a month at Pledang and told me "your father was of great value to us. If we were down he would come by with his friendly facial expression and calm voice and we would be on top of things in no time." I'm convinced that dad received a lot of strength from his faith.

In the course of time we did get less and less space in the house because there were more and more people moving in. In the end mother and I only had the front room and the furniture had been divided left and right. Only the dining table had gone to the veranda so that I could teach in the front portal (which was allowed again) and mother could teach inside.

Yeah, mum had nothing to do and that was when I advised her to try this and so I explained a few things to her. But I will honestly tell you that she taught as a fully accomplished teacher, she was actually better than a lot of many others. It was incredible to listen to her. She taught 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th class which were about 20 children all together. They all brought their own stool and a new class would start every hour. This is how we worked from 7.30-12AM. Mum would teach again from 1.30-2.30PM and then around four o'clock in the afternoon, the children would come back to have their work marked or to do some extra reading or something like that. In the evening mum would write calculations in their notebooks and rows with words that contained ij, ei, ch, sch, au, ou etcetera. She did that for every child. And she wrote all the grammar rules. This ended up with magnificent results. You can understand that she didn't have much time left so I would do the room between 6 and 7 in the morning. On Saturdays we would have "bonkar" [to clean up the room] because we wouldn't be working then. Mother, of course, couldn't help herself and would help anyone that was having difficulties.

Either way, at least she couldn't worry about you. I've often been angry when she would sigh: "If that boy is okay" - but when she had passed away, I have to admit, that I often had the same thoughts and that's when I got tough. You will notice this, because I'm telling you everything just one after another. After all that's how life is Paul, it doesn't stop when someone passes away.

At eleven thirty I would start to cook. The children would fight over who could make the fire but they each got their turn. The food consisted of a cup of rice with 3 cups of water, a stew of "oebiblarren, dengdeng", onion leaves and a tomato. And every now and then there would be something else but usually the vegetables from the streets weren't good to use. Sometimes we would make "hete bliksem" [typical dutch food: mashed potatoes with apple] out of "oebie" and pineapple or if we would have noodles we could make "bami met kaantjes" noodles with bacon. Other than that, cooking

would mean a "peuyeum" pie [cassave] with "goelahdjawa" [javanese sugar] four times a week. If we would have "asem": breadcrumb with "asem syrup", sometimes "borstplaat" but these were treats.

On your birthday we had a breadcrumb pie, baked "oebie" and a cup of coffee with "Klimmelk" from a Red Cross food package, which was delicious.

After treats like that we would warm up the porridge, don't be shocked, half a cup of rice with five cups of water. Of that we would eat some in the evening and then again some in the morning with bread. Then the kettle would go on for tea. Once a day we would have a warm supper. Except for Sunday morning when we would have tea and toasted bread. Because of mum's work we would drink tea at three o'clock. And by the way three times a week I would teach another class from 4-5.

You can see that we were busy over there. Mother gradually lost more weight but she was healthy enough. I had chickenpox last June but it wasn't too bad. Mother's skin started to show red spots in October and was told to stay in bed and eat a lot of bacon and "dengdeng" [dried spicy meat], fats and also drink milk. For 14 days she taught her classes from her bed because she wouldn't stop teaching. The spots disappeared and mother was unstoppable again.

On Friday the 10th of November 1944 we received a message: "Friday 17th of November transportation". Nobody knew where to. "Bring 20 kilos". That was no problem, because we didn't had our cabin trunks sent over, so we didn't have more than 20 kilos. When we left Karees mum weighed 45 kilos and I weighed 47.5 kilos. She was still fit though.

I will never forget that journey. At 4 o'clock Japanese time, we were standing on a square. The suitcases, duffle bags and backpacks were already on the train. We had to walk to the station, that was only ten minutes. At five thirty we were on the train. I had found a nice corner seat for mum in the fourth class wagon of course. At six our train departed, with the windows blinded.

We were delighted because the people that had left on the day before us had to wait until 11 o'clock for the train to finally depart. But no, we were taken to another station and then had to wait there till 11 o'clock. The "Heiho's" [Indonesian guards] had told us that we would probably go to Semarang. Other than that the guys didn't say much. Lax security. Thank God we could open the windows during the night but it wasn't light yet or we'd hear: "Toetoepe" [Close the windows].

Night time on that train was horrendous. The mothers had laid their children on the benches and on the floor, which meant that we couldn't walk anywhere at all, which would then cause conflicts when the ladies had to go to the toilet. We didn't get anything to drink at all till one thirty that day in Kroja. Nobody had anything left to drink which was especially terrible for the ones with little children. "Mamma Mamma, just a sip" and then the mums

wouldn't have anything for them.

In Kroja we received a decent amount of rice, some "sambal" beans and a piece of baked fish with some "kroepoek". Besides we did also get two pieces of bread and a big cookie for the journey, so food was taken care of. We travelled that whole Saturday and we were shocked when we realised that we had to spend another night on the train. Nobody said anything anymore. It was pitch-black in the wagon. Mum then also lay down on a raincoat on the floor to get some sleep and I sat down on a backpack, against another one (which lay on the middle bench) having the wall as support for my back. I was on top of cans so I got sore body parts and numb legs after a while. There were people on the floor so I had to keep my legs still.

To make matters worse, it started to rain and so we had to keep the windows closed at night as well. At 5.30AM the train suddenly stopped and we were ordered to get out. The Japanese guy was screaming. We were obviously not prepared for this. Imagine the consternation for the mothers whose children were still sleeping. At the platform there was suddenly a sign saying "Ambarawa" to which I immediately added: malaria.

We were taken onto trucks and started a miserable journey to Banjoe Biroe, 6 kilometres ahead. Because it was dark we couldn't see where we were and when I asked a girl who helped us with our handluggage: "Where are we?" and I got the answer: "Jail", I thought I was going to faint.

Indeed, I saw bars going high up and I saw the expressions in the eyes of the women. That's when I knew: They were demoralised. They had been there for nine months already and the only comfort that they could give us was: "you'll get used to it".

We came onto a ward with 45 people, all separate cubicles, separated by sheets, dresses, cloths on a line, "Klamboes" [mosquito-nets], in one word: a terrible mess. Passar Senen is beautiful compared to it. There were so many women on the bunks. We were assigned a space: "This is for you, 65 cm". We, who'd always still had a comfortable own feather bed.

The toilets were holes in the ground; luckily there was a barrel for older people like mum to sit on. I was missing our beautiful, clean, white toilet. We had become natives.

We were with 2,000 women in a jail which was meant for only 1,000 men. The jail was signed off because of lice. Later it became even 3,000 women. This was from the 1st of May and we only had 45 cm left per person. The only thing we could say that day was: "This is bad". We didn't have Sundays there because chores had to be done every day and also the roll calls in Japanese style.

That was shocking to us because we had always had a large amount of freedom at the camp. The only consolation was the food which was way better, although it didn't contain any animal fat or protein. This obviously became worse gradually and I can tell you that we knew what true hunger feels like.

The number of deaths was increasing quickly. There were 8 in April, 13 in May, 24 in June, 36 in July and 56 in August. It happened three times that there were six on one day, all from hunger oedema. As far as I know there were seven cases in which the women were completely confused as a result of the hunger oedema. Everybody walked around with red spots or swollen legs in May, even the small children. The doctor said that half the people would have died in six months' time. You can understand the mood we were in.

However we have good memories as well. The holidays for instance and particularly Christmas and Easter were celebrated beautifully. And the relationship between mum and I was really good. Unlike our time in Karees where we didn't get along well but in B.B. we were completely dependent on each other and so that went really well from February onwards.

Mum and me, we had a good time together. I talked to her a lot and she would frequently ask me what I thought about certain things. I got to know her really well but we will talk about her character later, won't we? Another big difference was that I changed a lot in those months; I became wiser and calmer. When you left, you said: "Stay the way you are" but I think you'll be happy with these changes. Rinus is at least.

I will tell you later who Rinus is. Oh, I'm not done by a long shot. I've been writing all morning already and I feel like I'm actually talking to you. I want to tell you everything right away so you'll have time to think about it all. Will you write me back in detail as well? That way I can get used to you again since we've been estranged from each other a lot in these three years. Even more because I thought that you were in America and later because I had given up on you.

Even at B.B. we were teaching again, this way mum had her whole morning scheduled in. We received half a piece of bread per week per child or something equal to that. I had other chores first, like "patjollen" [to weed], carrying bricks and patrolling the toilets, so I didn't earn that much yet then.

In February I was assigned to keep the children busy from 9.30AM till 11.30AM. There were 20 children who were 7 years of age. That was really good. I would teach them different songs and rhymes which mum had taught me and you know how many she knew. A lot of old songs and I would read to them: fairy tales and stories from the children's bible. The latter was what they particularly enjoyed, the stories of Jesus and Moses was what appealed to them since they were going through similar battles. The crucifixion of Jesus and then the forgiveness that came afterwards. Would they now not be allowed to kill the Japanese? You can understand how a lot of difficult questions came out of that and that I was struggling to answer those myself. Other than that I taught them a lot of "zaakonderwijs" [education about the society] and it was interesting to see their reactions and check how far their memories went back.

Mum was apart from a teacher also a nurse on the ward. This was very busy occasionally and I warned her often but she always said: "Just let me, I'm happy to do it and even though I'm skinny, I'm still in good health". She was very cheerful during that time and she was always surrounded by children. I can still picture her friendly face with the very grey hair and those interested kids faces around her. All of them, even the naughtiest ones, loved her. The sadness amongst the kids when she died was sincere. They kept her memory alive in their minds. They would constantly talk about her and also during the classes I would notice that they were still thinking of her a lot.

I repeatedly reminded her about occurrences from our childhood during those months and I let her know how grateful we always were for everything that she had done for us. She got sick on the 1st of July. She, who was always hungry and would always ask me: "Nel, don't we have anything anymore, just a piece of "goelagjava" [javanese sugar] or something? Let's finish it. Gone is gone, is what I always say", she didn't want any food now. That was on a Sunday. She got diarrhoea on Monday and Tuesday there was blood and slime and the doctor concluded that it was bacterial dysentery. She had already thought of that herself. The directress of the hospital, madam van der Hoeven, also an old deaconess from the 'Overtoom', told me about the disease. A lack of fat will cause an infection on the small and large intestines, by then the liver has already been sick for about six months. The illness eventually progresses into the brain after which the patient will become mad. Thank God that this only lasted for one night with our mother, she ended up dying from the illness as well as from exhaustion. She had nothing left.

The first week she pretty much stayed the same, the second week she started to recover and I was getting hopeful but then she started to go worse in the third week. She was often very nervous, she cried a lot and really needed me. The fourth week we were basically waiting for the end. Sunday morning on the 29th of July at 6.10AM Japanese time is when she died. A true blessing.

That night from Monday to Tuesday, I sat with her. She had requested that and luckily nurse van der Hoeven was okay with it. I could see that it could have lasted a few more days, even though she was already changing a lot. I was with her again on Wednesday to Thursday even though the situation did not seem serious yet, however, half an hour after I came home the nurses came to get me. From that moment on until Saturday evening, I only had about 3.5 hours of sleep. I sat by her bed, I fed her and I talked to her. It was so nice Paul but so hard to let your mother go. Despite of that, I couldn't see her suffering like that and she was so brave and calm. Her intestines were hurting severely and everything was burning, she would "go" ten times a day. Her small little face would twitch and it was extremely tragic. One time she said: "Nel, I'm not simulating anything you know but I'm just so tired,

every fibre in my body is tired." Mum tired, Have you ever seen that Paul?

I'm glad that you didn't see her like she was then; you should keep the good memories about a healthy, fun and chubby mum. You would not want to believe it, mum was just skin and bones, her chest and abdominal cavity were just hollow. You'll now understand that she had to pass away. I was feeding her some milk or egg with a teaspoon and she would lick it up like a young puppy. I was struggling to be strong when I saw that. She didn't want anyone else to help her (so we knew her) and she asked me once: "Can I just try to drink a little again?" but she just couldn't. Even though she was longing for peace she still didn't give up the battle for life. When I once asked her if she didn't want to see Father and Paul again, she said: "You know that". She didn't leave a message for you or Father because she was convinced that both of you had passed away. I constantly told her that she shouldn't just think about me and that I was there for you and Father as well. She would look at me, smile a little with the left corner of her mouth and fall back a sleep again.

She wasn't afraid of death as she said so herself, "Safely in the arms of Jesus, safely in the heart of Jesus, there is his tender mercy, that is where my soul will be in peace." Yes she didn't have an easy life unfortunately. She talked about it in a completely calm manner. On Wednesday she asked me: "What outfit will I wear in the coffin?" She wanted to know that exactly. She wore her white pyjamas with blue roses, you'll know that one. She'd always saved it and it was nicely starched and beautifully white. She also wore white socks and she was wrapped in a blanket (on her own request) because the coffins were made out of bamboo slats. She also wanted to know what I would be wearing. (I had a black dress) And who would be speaking at the service who would carry her. Strong hey? One of the times that I was struggling, she saw it and tears welled up in her eyes when I told her that I was willing to let her go and be in peace but that it was just incredibly hard. She said: "It is difficult to separate from the ones you love." When she couldn't swallow anymore on Friday, I would wet her lips and I would cool her burning hands in cold water which she loved. "Indescribable" she would sigh. She was so grateful. "Angel," she once said, "I would want to put you in gold." And another time: "I have always loved you so much." Nice hey, that is was like this eventually. As a last request she asked me to check properly whether she was actually dead. "In my arms, my head, dead is ice cold, Nel." Indeed, I will never forget that coldness. On Friday night she suddenly shouted: "Oh dear lord please come, I can't take it anymore." She became restless and had some drugs, she was very happy for that. It was on Saturday night around seven thirty that she got really confused and that is when I left. She didn't regain consciousness after that. And when I told her that I was leaving she didn't respond. She died that morning.

I went to the funeral and it was formal as far as possible. She's laid to rest at Ambarawa, grave G134. I then had a high fever on Monday and

Tuesday, 39.6 – 39.4, a reaction to the lack of sleep. From the 7th of June I started taking over mum's students and I continued teaching them.

I worked from eight till six, every day, until the capitulation, I had one week off and started working as a nurse on mum's ward from the 1st of September. It is such magnificent work, much more beautiful than teaching. I worked there for a period of three weeks exactly and put my heart and soul into it and I can tell you that I'm really grateful for it. I understand now what had motivated mother so much.

When I received father's obituary I decided to go to Bandoeng for further information. And also because the only person that meant something for me was in Tjimahi, my fiancé: Marinus Sanderse. You probably won't understand this. I will write more about this next time. Our father and mother were very delighted with the engagement. He's going to be 31 years old on the 17th of November (which nobody believes when they see him). He is "aspirant controleur binnenlands bestuur" [aspirant controller domestic governance], he's got all the good qualities and a well working brain; he's exactly the man that I need.

He lived near the family 't Hart in '39. I will tell you more about this next time; you've already got so much to process. Frieda Quispel will be my sister in law; he is a full Dutchman though. I'm now in his camp with some other ladies and I'm receiving some excellent care here. I was completely worn out but the doctor did patch me up this month. I feel a lot better already even though I'm only weighing about 45 kilos.

Will you soon write me back elaborately Paul? I'm so anxious to hear from you. You will be exhausted from reading this letter and it is all so unclear. Find the strength to process this grief my boy. You're still young, the future is open for you and we've got great memories about our parents, don't we?

*Bye Paul, best wishes from Rinus and a big hug
Your Nel*

Chapter 18

Translated by: Mandy and Lou Westende

The Naval Aviation Service in Sydney

We remained only one week in Melbourne, where we were enrolled and received our summer and winter uniforms of the Dutch Royal Navy together with a hammock and two woollen blankets. The first week in Australia gave us a feeling as if we had landed in paradise. As one left the lodge one was straight away on the beach of Port Phillip Bay where one could swim or hire a sail boat. Another one hundred metres further along there was a skating ring where one could skate and dance on ice.

Also one could take the tram to the city centre, going to the cinema or eating out. There were milk bars everywhere where we enjoyed milk shakes which were the favourite drink at the time. We had not enjoyed and tasted fresh milk for a long time. The people were very friendly and we were invited everywhere. I received an invitation to spend Boxing Day with an Australian family who came to pick me up by car and also took me back to our base at Queens Mansions.

We flew to Sydney on 31 December 1945 where my adventure as a Navy person commenced and lasted for the next 18 months. As the Navy already had a base for Catalinas in Rose Bay they accommodated staff from Manila close by in Rose Bay near Point Piper. The Navy had rented a large three-story mansion which became the



Ardenbraught sideview



Ardenbraught frontview



Dentist Ardenbraught Dr. McCabe

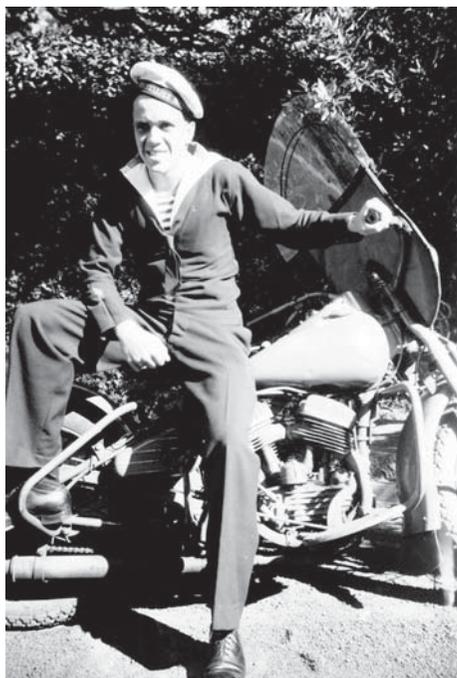
lodging for Officers and sailors of the Navy Air Service. It was a beautiful building with thick sandstone walls and a fantastic view over Rose Bay on one side and Sydney Harbour on the other.

The name of this mansion was "Ardenbraught". Point Piper was then (and still is) one of the most expensive areas in Sydney. The house was not renovated. The best rooms were made available for the Officers and the largest room became the Officers' Mess complete with bar.

The other rooms were used as bedrooms where we slept in bunk beds three high. One of the rooms was made into a sick-bay and another room was allocated to a dentist. Most of us were ex-POWs who had not been able to see a dentist for many years. Dr McCabe, an Australian, signed a contract with the Navy and for the next 12 months he worked on mending our teeth. His assistant and the telephonist who operated the switchboard were the only Australian girls on the base. They never had an idle moment.

Our work began just after one day's leave in Sydney. There was much to do. We travelled by bus, jeep or truck to Sydney's Mascot Airport. That was only a half hour trip. Our Dakotas were

parked there on the grass as no hangars were available. Everybody had to help to scrape off the camouflage paint from the aluminium of each aircraft. We used paint strippers but one had to be careful not to inhale the fumes as it could affect one's health. All 15 Dakotas had to be changed from grey-green appearances to shiny silver-grey bod-



Paul on motorbike Sydney August 1946

ies and had to be painted with red, white and blue circles on the fuselage.

We heard these Dakotas could now fly twenty miles per hour faster – but this is unlikely as they were not noted for speed, whatever their paint job. The aircraft were mostly used to evacuate women and children from Japanese Camps in Indonesia and fly them to Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. After untold flights some 20,000 passengers were taken out of Indonesia. On the way back to Indonesia we supplied some 800,000 kilos of medicine, food, clothing and other life saving materials. We often

had to assist in loading the Dakotas. This had to be calculated very precisely so that the load was balanced.

The Navy also bought a pair of Catalinas from the base at Rathmines. These flying boats had been moored to a buoy for a long time. They were well used by the seagulls which was not very good as the wings were mainly covered with sailcloth and hence a lot of the wings were left with holes. We had to cover these holes with small squares of new sailcloth and all this with a bent needle and special glue. It was very tedious work and we sat for hours on end with bended heads on the wings of the Catalinas as they were moored to their buoys. The worst part was that the up-and-down movements on the water all day made one sea sick. Thanks to our make-do repairs both the Catalinas were safe to fly to a place where they could get a complete overhaul.

Our Dakotas, because they were so well maintained, became more expensive and therefore had to be guarded by night against theft. We also had to guard a hangar where new parts for the Dakotas were kept. Everyone in turn had to stand guard in rotation. We were not allowed to carry weapons but we had rubber batons we could use for our defence. I hated to stand guard. Firstly, I would rather sleep but secondly, there was also something that was even worse. On one side of the airport was the Cook's River, which smelled at low tide and

on the other side were a lot of tanneries. They were located there as nobody lived nearby because of the intolerable smell. When one was on guard duty at the airport and the wind was coming from the wrong direction it was necessary to patrol the area with a handkerchief over one's face to do the patrolling.

One of the boys in my section was Jos Meesters. He was in charge of the Officers' Mess. The two of us and some other friends often went out together. As the base grew with more Flight Officers he was allowed to enrol a helper and I got the job to work for him. That had a lot of advantages. As a sideline I could wash and iron the uniforms of the Officers. I had a price list which was a bit cheaper than what the shops in town charged and we always had customers. It was all profit as I had the use of the laundry of the barracks and had nothing to pay for the soap, the machine and the irons. This gave me quite a bit of extra income. Often I received a packet of American cigarettes from the Officers as a tip. One could sell the packet for one pound at Kings Cross, the entertainment area of Sydney.



**Drawing of St Michael church
Sydney 4 May 1946**

I also earned very well from my drawings. As I was free on Saturdays and Sundays I would find a nice house and draw it in black crayon and charcoal. Very often it did not take long for the owner of the house to come outside and have an inquisitive look at what I was doing. It was a strange sightseeing a sailor in uniform sitting on a crate and drawing your house. "Do you mind if I have a look?" he would ask. I told him that in civil life I was a drawing instructor and that my work was for sale. Often they would buy my sketches for five pounds. One of my clients said: "I

will buy it in the hope that one day you will be famous. Then I can sell it for fifty pounds."

I bought a bicycle, a "Malvern Star" with the money I earned. It made me no longer dependent on buses and trams, which travelled very rarely on the weekends - just on the days we wanted to go somewhere. I had a lady friend in Northbridge on the other side of Sydney Harbour and there was no direct connection by tram or bus but on the

bike I could get there in half an hour. Her parents, Mr & Mrs Vacchini accepted me as an extra member of the family. Mr Vacchini was Headmaster of the Arts Department at East Sydney Technical College. I learned a lot from him. They appreciated the fact that I cycled from Point Piper over the Harbour Bridge to Northbridge. I also had to pay the toll for my bike, a penny per trip. The ticket was somewhat unusual. It read: One penny for bicycle or sheep. I never saw a sheep crossing the bridge.

When Mr Vacchini found out that I was interested in camping, he organised a weekend with his son and myself to stay overnight in a tent in the bush in North Sydney. We slept on a bed of eucalyptus leaves and that was my introduction to the Australian bush. The night was full of strange noises of owls: "boe-boek...moo-pook"....I thought at one stage that I heard a baby crying but my host assured me that it was koalas. Occasionally we heard a kangaroo or wallaby beside the tent: "stomp – stomp – stomp". It was all completely new to me and I shall never forget that night.

Even though we worked hard at Mascot and Rose Bay on the maintenance of the Dakotas and Catalinas we had a lot of pleasure just as in the song: "Waar de meisjes zijn, waar de meisjes zijn, daar is het bal..." (translated: "Where the girls are, where the girls are, there is a ball")

Chapter 19

Translated by: Harold Jacobs

The Naval Aviation Service at Point Piper

Sailors and officers of the Royal Netherlands Navy were very popular with the girls in Sydney. Our uniforms looked very nice and the fact that we were Dutch was also an attraction. Besides that we had more money because our wages were higher than the wages of the Australian Navy.

We also had the big advantage that the crew of every airplane received an allowance for every flight hour. The lower ranks received ten shillings and the officers and pilots received one pound. We always tried as mechanics to fly along to help loading the gasoline and mooring to a buoy for the Catalinas or with the loading or unloading of Dakotas. On the longer flights between the Indies and Australia we were thinking how we could spend all this money when back in Sydney.

The main attractions for us were Luna Park, the Trocadero, the Glaciarium, the cinema, Taronga Zoo and the beautiful beaches. Luna Park was a great amusement park on the shores of Sydney harbour where you had to go by ferry boat. There you had a beautiful view from the highest point of the Ferris wheel. Our favourite was the "Tunnel of Love". It was a small canal in which you sailed in a quadruple boat in a pitch-dark tunnel. After each tour there was a surprise, like a dancing skeleton, an ugly monster, a growling tiger, etc. The girls most of



Trocadero ticket



Elephant ride at Taronga Zoo Sydney

the time sought protection in the arms of their Dutch sailor.

The Trocadero was a very large ballroom with a magnificent dancing floor and an outstanding orchestra. Everyone had to be dressed very well. Men were not admitted unless wearing a jacket and a tie. The ladies had to be dressed in a long dress. Military were allowed to come in uniform. Here we learnt the meaning of "fifty-fifty". Half of the time we were dancing the waltz, foxtrot, quickstep, tango and the other half of the evening we learnt how to dance Australian folk dancing, like the Barn dance, Pride of Erin, Canadian 3-step, Hokey-pokey and so on. There were always girls around who wanted to teach you. The Trocadero was the place to be to find a new girlfriend!

I also have nice memories of the Glaciarium. It was an ice rink close to Central Station. You could hire your skates for a whole evening. A good orchestra was playing there. Every hour, 15 minutes were reserved for ice dancing. Everyone had to leave the ice to make room for fancy dressed couples complete with gloves who skated around fully in harmony with the music. It was a beautiful sight. There were instructors teaching people how to do it. And that is how I learned ice dancing. This was the culmination of each evening at the Glaciarium.

Sydney had many cinemas. They were much better than what we were used to before the war. They were beautifully and nicely decorated buildings, luxuriously provided with velvet chairs and carpet on the floor. They had three classes and in some of the cinemas soldiers with a lower rank were not admitted in first class: that was meant only for officers. Every chair had a number and girls in nice uniforms accompanied you to your seat. Fifteen minutes before the film began and also during the interval, a musician played a Hammond organ coming up with an elevator from under the stage floor. The organists were famous and their music made a night at the cinema a double pleasure.

Each weekend the Taronga Park Zoo was crowded with soldiers and their girlfriends. It was a beautiful park where many animals walked around freely but it was still safe for the public. The place in the park where most pictures were taken was a very large clock in the ground on a slope where all numbers were growing in a 10 metre wide circle. They were miniature bushes with coloured leaves meticulously cut for the right number, in contrast with the green grass underneath.

In summer we often went to the beach. The coast of Sydney has dozens of beautiful beaches. During the weekends each beach was guarded by lifeguards, all volunteers, who regularly saved swimmers' lives if they were in trouble. Drowning people were brought back to the beach with a line or a special rowing boat.

Good swimmers of the Naval Aviation Service quickly learned the meaning of "surfing". You learned the difference between a large wave that brought you as much as one hundred metres back to the beach and a "dumper" that turned you upside down and dumped you on the bottom. You had to learn to identify 'dumpers' and dive under them. Most of the time we went to Bondi Beach. It was the nearest beach but it was always very crowded. That's why I went many times to Bronte Beach a bit further south.

There I made friends with some members of the Surf Club. One of them lent me a surf board. It was five metres long, hollow, about five centimetres thick and 40 centimetres wide. It consisted of a light wooden frame, covered with waterproof plywood, varnished in layers. First I learned lying on the surf board how to ride a wave, then on my knees and finally standing up. I will never forget the sensation I felt the first time I came back to the beach standing on the surf board. My legs were black and blue of the many times I fell off the board when I lost balance but it was all worthwhile!

Dutch sailors were invited everywhere to parties and house parties. We almost all spoke quite good English and it only took us a couple of months before the first of us got engaged to Australian girls. In those days you had to ask permission from your commander if you wanted to marry. I was best man twice for buddies who had chosen the path of marriage for their future. When married you received more wages and didn't have to live in the barracks.

Life in the barracks was actually quite nice and we lacked nothing. Discipline was good but not too strict. We worked very well together as a team. Every sub-unit had to do unpleasant jobs like peeling pota-



Peeling potatoes at Ardenbraught 1946

toes, scrubbing floors and mopping. In our spare time we played cards a lot – games like Contract Bridge. Some of the sailors could play piano or guitar very well and this helped to keep the whole crew happy and satisfied. However on 26 March 1946 we received bad news. Our aircraft the Q12 with a five-man crew on

its way to Darwin didn't land there. Radio contact was lost and the plane didn't send an SOS or Mayday. What had happened? Did it crash, had the plane made an emergency landing somewhere in the desert in the outback? Had the crew survived a potential crash? Everyone on the base was very depressed and the only thing we could do was hope for the best.

Two of our Dakotas were sent out to follow the same route as Q12 with a crew of Naval Aviation Service men who searched the monotonous landscape with binoculars but we found nothing. Only after five days we heard that the missing crew was saved. After wandering through the wilderness for days they had reached a road where they were picked up by Australians. That is how they came back to the civilised world. Their plane had made an emergency landing and was heavily damaged. Luckily no one was injured but the plane was written off. The whole base at Point Piper was very relieved. We hadn't lost anybody.

At the end of the war in August 1945 the military commanders decided they would organise a Victory Parade through the streets of Sydney on request of the citizens of the city. But they had to wait until the Army, Navy and Air force had brought back all their personnel from Europe, the Middle-East and the Pacific. That took several months but eventually the date was fixed for 10 June 1946.

Because the Netherlands Defence Forces had played an important role in the Defence of Australia and the battle against the Japanese they were also invited to participate in the Victory Parade. The Dutch Government sent the destroyer "Piet Hein" to Sydney to show the flag and 200 men from Point Piper were ordered to march in the Parade.

That was a major challenge to all the boys. We only had a couple of weeks to learn how to march again with Lee-Enfield rifles with fixed bayonets on our shoulders all at the same time in the same direc-



Grim looking training for Victory Parade Sydney 10 June 1946



Victory Parade Sydney 19 June 1946 3rd group RNNAV



Victory Parade Boys van de Piet Hein

tion, in closed ranks of sailors all looking straight ahead. To practise we used Wentworth Avenue, the street where our Barracks "Ardenbraught" was located. The rich decent citizens of Point Piper couldn't believe their eyes when we were marching up and down the street every day. The war had actually ended, right?

The few weeks of preparing just flew by but our officers managed to transform us into a good marching group they could be proud of. On 10 June we went in trucks into town to participate in the largest parade Sydney had ever seen. Along the route there were tens of thousands of cheering people. The reception the Dutch Royal Navy received was immense. We marched in two groups. The whole crew of the "Piet Hein" marched in front, followed by the detachment of the Naval Aviation Service. Everyone who participated that day in the Victory Parade will never forget it.

At Point Piper we were not the only ones living there. On the other side of the road was a big building reserved for women serving with the Royal Australian Air Force. It was strictly forbidden to get into contact with them. The same restriction was imposed on our neighbours. The only thing we could do was watch. But one day one of our sailors installed a set of bomb aimer's binoculars in the top floor, directed towards the windows of the sleeping rooms where the RAAF girls were located. Every now and then there

was a big excitement and a large queue of boys was standing in line to use the bomb aimer's equipment in turn. Unfortunately our boatswain heard something about this and in a mysterious way the binoculars disappeared from the stage.



**Harry Fryling with Ambon Sydney
July 1946**

Our base also had a mascot. It was a very nice dog by the name of Ambon. When the Naval Air Service closed their base on the island of Ambon the personnel went to Australia. But they didn't want to leave this nice and faithful dog behind so they took Ambon in a Catalina to Rose Bay. No quarantine, no injections. It was all possible in those days. That is how Ambon ended up at Point Piper where he slept in the guard room. He was everybody's friend as long as you were wearing a uniform. He only barked when someone entered the gates in civilian clothes.

In the middle of 1946 the air transport of women and children coming from the Japanese camps in the Indies to Australia

ended but the political situation in the former Dutch East Indies had changed completely. Soekarno declared the independent State of Indonesia and was supported by the Waterside Workers Union of Australia. The communists had the upper hand in this union - they decided to support Soekarno and refused to unload ships from the Netherlands in Australian ports. All Dutch ships were declared "black". However this was not a problem for the Dutch government. There were 260 sailors at Point Piper who could be used as dockworkers!

Chapter 20

Translated by: Sam de Haas

The Navy Solution



**Wharfies instead of sailors Fremantle
November 1946 Storing up the second deck**

The political situation in the former Dutch East Indies did not develop according to the Dutch government's expectations. The government had presumed that our colonial regime would take over again soon after the Japanese occupation. The government had not taken into account that the Japanese encouraged Indonesian independence groups. Some important Indonesians, led by Soekarno, declared the establishment of a new republic of Indonesia.

The British and Australian governments politically backed this socio-political movement. The Netherlands had not expected this and sent troops to the East Indies for so-called 'police actions'. Soekarno who had been banished to Boven-Digoel as a political pris-

oner before the war because of his communist activities was supported widely by the Australian newspapers and was praised as a freedom fighter.

The Australian Waterside Workers Union with a great number of communists in their administration supported Indonesian independence and every freight ship that sailed to an Indonesian harbour was declared "black". In response, the Dutch Naval Aviation Service based in Point Piper and Rose Bay was deployed. From one day to another, everyone was promoted to dock worker. We became 'wharfies' instead of sailors.

We had little knowledge about loading a ship. We couldn't use the cranes on the quay; the crane drivers were on strike as well. We were forced to work with a steam winch to lift the boxes, sacks and cases, manoeuvre them around above the ship and lower them into the hold, where we had to stow the freight. All material was placed on big nets on the shore, four tips of the net were attached to the hook and the foreman gave the signal to the steam winch driver. Using a complex system of cables and levers his duty was to lower every net safely into the hold. All signals were given by hand and using a whistle - walkie-talkies weren't invented yet.



Winch driver - Loading ships Sydney February 1947

During the first days after the war had ended, without shipping containers, loading and unloading ships was primitive. Everybody wanted to be a winch driver. Operating a steam winch was every boy's desire. When we were little we all wanted to be the driver of a steam-locomotive or a steam-winch! The opportunity finally presented itself here in Sydney. Only a limited number of people were appointed to this job with a lot of responsibility. Most of them were men with extensive experience as a crane driver.



Wharfies instead of sailors Fremantle November 1946

The riskiest job was receiving a fully loaded net in the hold. I can remember how, one day, the net was lowered too early and turned over on top of the hatch resulting in boxes falling down. Luckily we could all find cover behind the load on the deck in the hold.

The first ship we loaded was the "Manoora", an Australian vessel that was used as a troopship in the Pacific. The ship was loaded for Surabaya and the wharfies suspected that the ship would be transporting weapons and ammunition. The ship was declared "black". We didn't see anything but food, clothing, building material and a couple of jeeps.

The "Dutchies" weren't very popular with the dockworkers. We drove our trucks to Woolloomooloo Quay, where the wharfies were queued along the road to insult us. The government took measures enabling us to work without being bothered. The Navy decided we would be

loading ships 24 hours a day - three teams working 8 hours each. I hated the shift from midnight to 8 am! It didn't take long before we knew precisely how to load a ship. To the exasperation of the wharfies, one captain declared that we could load a ship in a third of the time the wharfies needed.

Our popularity with the Australians declined. We got a cool reception from people who sympathised with Soekarno and the Waterside



Loading ships

Workers Union. However they understood that most of the time we had no power and just had to do what the officers told us. A few times sailors who were walking alone through Hyde Park in Sydney were attacked and punched up because we loaded ships in the harbour. From that moment we always walked through the park with two or three mates. Some guys took a knife with them strapped to their leg, to be able to defend themselves. Luckily we never had any knife-fights.

Sydney was not the only harbour where ships destined for Indonesia were declared "black" by the Australian wharfies. Fremantle in Western Australia and Williamstown in the harbour of Melbourne were our next destinations. We had to load a Dutch freight ship, the "Bonaire". The job was a lot easier, the ship was built to be a freight ship with large bulkheads and better winches.



Paul with monkey Kees

The crew was friendlier and consisted of Dutchies. The ship's mascot was a monkey. During lunch we laughed at the monkey behaving like a madman. You had to pay attention to prevent the monkey from stealing your lunch. He also loved beer which made him fall in love. I will never forget the day the boatswain became the victim of the monkey falling in love.

During our time in Fremantle we were accommodated in Perth at Crawley Bay where the Royal Australian Air Force had a Catalina base. We slept in normal



Loading the Bonaire November 1946 Fremantle

barracks which had a special cooling system. A water pipe with sprinklers, which watered the roof, was affixed over the whole length of the top of the roof. The spray cooled the barracks and even on the hottest periods of the day the barracks were nice and cool.

The first night in Crawley Bay on the shore of the Swan River started with an exciting adventure. It had been a warm day and a couple of us decided to go for a swim in the river. When we were swimming in the middle of the Swan we suddenly saw three back fins. "Sharks!" I yelled.

We swam to the shore as fast as we could and the fins chased us. We expected to see the jaw of the shark any moment but the fins disappeared in another direction. When we stumbled onto the shore, panting and exhausted a couple of Australians were laughing at us. "What's the hurry, boys? They were only dolphins".

During the night we heard tigers or lions roaring. The boatswain, who was a little deaf, couldn't hear it and told us that we must have drunk too much beer. The next day we heard that the Perth' Zoo was located on the other side of the Swan.



Loading ships Sydney February 1947 - a truck load of lumpers

As

soon as we loaded the "Bonaire" we flew back to Williamstown in Melbourne to load the next ship. From there we continued back to Sydney for another loading of the "Manoora" which in the meanwhile had returned from Surabaya. We flew in our own Dakotas and we got the Australian nickname "the flying lumpers". (Dockworkers were often called "lumpers".)

All the domestic travelling in Australia was exciting for us. We usually got a couple of days off in every city, so we went everywhere. You could always find a girl to keep you company and most of us had a girlfriend in every port. Also, we were known on different airports where we had to land for refuelling such as Broken Hill, Adelaide, Forrest on the Nullabor Plain and Kalgoorlie, a city with gold mines in Western Australia. We usually spent the night in one of those places.

Our air travels didn't always go well. The weather was of great influence and sometimes we encountered mechanical problems. On one of our flight to Perth we had a frightening experience. The weather deteriorated but the pilot decided to push through and wanted to reach Perth before midnight. It was pitch black and lightning all over the place. Suddenly we were in the middle of a thunderstorm.

The turbulence became severe resulting in an uncontrollable airplane. We were afraid that the wing would separate from the aircraft. Every loose item in the airplane was flying through the cabin. In between the benches on every side of the Dakota a big box was secured to the floor with chains. One of them broke and a big hole in the floor formed. Luckily, the pilot regained control of the aircraft and the decision was made to make an emergency landing in Kalgoorlie where we landed safely. We disembarked with great relief and thanked the Douglas Company for building such solid aircraft.



Tea at Broken Hill

In Broken Hill, the western part of New South Wales, we had another remarkable experience. We had a flat tyre after landing. Repair of the tyre was not possible and we had to wait for a new one which would arrive from Sydney by airplane. This meant that we had to spend two nights in Broken Hill. That was quite an experience for the local people.

Twenty Dutch sailors were staying in a city in the far West of New South Wales. After the war Broken Hill became a prosperous community totally dependent on mines where silver, lead and copper were dug up. The city had 47 hotels and pubs for the miners to buy a drink. We were encouraged to drink a beer in every pub, which was totally worth the effort; the taprooms in the different hotels all had their own characteristics. We were often paid for and treated.

We were invited by local families to dinners. A nice girl took me home to meet her parents. Her older brother was in the Australian Army and was serving in Borneo. He hadn't returned yet. But the hospitality came with a price and most of us woke up with an enormous hangover.

As soon as the Dakota brought the new tyre we encountered another problem. The miners union, which had a good relationship with the dockworkers, refused to lend us their air pump to inflate the new tyre. Their intention was to support their mates and keep the Dutch Dakota grounded. But they hadn't accounted for Dutch perseverance. We grabbed a foot pump, made to inflate car-tyres and the twenty of us started pumping one after the other. Naturally, the pump became



Good old Dakota

really hot and we needed a second man to cool the pump down using a water hose. After an hour the foot pump was totally worn out and we got a new pump. The air pressure inside the tyre increased slowly and in the end, the pilot decided that we could depart safely. Farewell Broken Hill.

The newspapers were full of articles about the rabbit plague which devoured the landscape and turned the lightly covered land into a desert. We could see that clearly when landing at Forrest in South Australia. This airport was located halfway between Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie. We had to land there for fuel every time. The base was fenced to keep the rabbits out. They tried to get in lured by the green grass and other vegetation growing there. However the fence was

maintained very well and thousands of dead rabbits, which were starved, were lying along the fence. We had never seen anything like this before.



Wharfies instead of sailors Fremantle November 1946



The last ship we loaded was the "Manoora". The wharfies still suspected us of shipping weapons and ammunition to Indonesia. We saw every box that was loaded and we never encountered any weapons or bullets.

One day a net full of boxes of liquor destined for the officers' messes in Surabaya, was lowered into the hold. It was lowered too quickly and some bottles of Johnny Walker broke. The net was raised quickly and we filled our canteens with whiskey. Too bad for the officers in Surabaya! I had an accident on the same ship. We were loading a jeep, which came down secured by some steel cables. When the jeep was 1.5 metres above the deck the winch stopped and the jeep started swinging around. It swung in my direction; there was no way out for me. I ducked down and instinctively protected my head using my arms. The jeep banged against the side of the hold and luckily I was low enough to not be killed by the jeep. But

the leather glove of my right hand didn't survive. My forefinger was cut and I could see the bone. The tissue was loose, which I used to cover the bone on my finger before the first aid came to bandage me.

I was brought up and transported to St. Vincent's hospital by ambulance. The doctors told me they had to amputate my finger. I couldn't agree. I told them I was an art teacher and I needed my forefinger to be able to hold a pencil or a brush. At that time I didn't know anything about microsurgery but the skilled doctors stitched my finger very

professionally and I was able to draw again only one month after the incident.

The end of our stay in Australia and the loading of ships in Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle came in July 1947. The Waterside Workers lifted the ban on Dutch vessels and consequently we weren't needed anymore in Australia. The conscripted sailors were given the choice to demobilise in Australia or the Netherlands.

This meant a free trip to the Netherlands. Although I lost my parents, I wanted to see my sister Nel and my uncles, aunties, nephews, nieces and cousins, before I would return to Australia to start a new life. As a result I joined some colleagues of the Dutch Naval Aviation Service aboard the P&O passenger ship the 'Asturias'.

Chapter 21

Translated by: Naomi van Loon

Back to the Netherlands

We departed on 1 July, 1947. Hundreds of friends and relatives were waving from across the docks and the passengers on the ship threw coloured streamers down to maintain a last direct line with people for as long as possible. When the tugboats slowly pulled the ship away,



Asturias at Pyrmont in Sydney 1 July



Asturias Good-bye all the best!



Asturias departure Melbourne

these last connections to the mainland too were broken. We were on our way to Europe via the Suez Canal to Southampton in England.

We first went to Melbourne to pick up more passengers then on to Fremantle in Western Australia. Unfortunately, it wasn't all smooth sailing. Australia's south coast is known for its stormy seas in the Great Australian Bight, a part of the Southern Ocean. We sailed into



Bunk beds - Asturia

some bad weather and many of us were sea sick. The dining chambers were empty. Fortunately the weather improved when we reached the Indian Ocean.



Mess hall - Asturias

From Fremantle we crossed over to Aden, the longest journey without seeing land. The "Asturias" had three classes; First, Second and Third class. We travelled as Third class passengers. During the war the ship had been used as a troop transport ship and even though First and Second class were rebuilt for tourists the Third class in the bow of the

ship was still furnished for troop transport. We slept in three-level bunk beds and ate in the common canteen. We had access to a large recreation room with tables and chairs where we could play cards, write letters or read. When the weather was good we entertained ourselves with deck games and of course we loved a walk.

The first few days we strolled around the entire ship but the First and Second class passengers objected to that and so the captain decided that the Third class passengers had to stay on the fore deck – the rest of the ship was “off-limits”. Access to starboard and port side was guarded day and night. We felt very insulted; we had won the war but were nevertheless treated as third-class citizens! Our group contained a few Australians who were infuriated by the restrictions on our freedom. Fortunately for us they belonged to a group that had established a jazz-band: Graham Bell Dixieland Jazz Band.



Graham Bell dixieland jazz on board Asturias

They were on their way to a Communist youth congress in Prague, where they had been invited to perform. I am not sure if Graham Bell and the members of his band were communists but he became the leader of the opposition movement against the Apartheid policy on our ship. During a protest gathering he told us his band would organise so many performances, concerts and parties, that we would be the ones having to place guards to prevent the First and Second class from visiting us.

And that was exactly what happened. Every afternoon they played for us. It was an excellent band that would become very famous later on.

The ladies and gentlemen from the First and Second class were lined up three rows across the fences on the deck slab to listen from a distance. The band members formed an interesting company. They were all night owls, addicted to poker. Until deep in the night they would play every night often involving large sums of cash. In real Hollywood fashion they wore green eye shades, smoked cigars and drank gin and whiskey surrounded by poor seamen. We would often wonder how they could afford that.

When we reached the equator King Neptune came aboard, complete with a large razor, a paintbrush and a bucket filled with soft soap and white flour. The victims who were crossing the equator for the first time were treated well with the mixture from the bucket, then shaved bald and afterwards washed clean with the help of a fire hose with sea water. A spray of water would "accidentally" be fired at the First-classers who were watching us from the promenade deck.

In Aden we were allowed to go ashore by boat; the ship remained moored. We were warned not to eat anything and advised not to walk alone. Aden had played an important role during the war. There was not much to see but we were often approached by English-speaking Arabs who invited us to dubious places for entertainment of some sort. We bought a few bottles of beer. It was a local product with a green label. It tasted awful. I said, "Pour it straight back into the camel!"

The next phase was the Red Sea to Suez. This would be the most fun part of our journey. It was full moon and every night Graham Bell's band played beautiful dance music on the deck where we danced all night. There was no shortage of girls as there were many war-brides aboard on their way to their husbands in Holland. The weather was amazing and everybody enjoyed these evenings except the other passengers.

In Suez we had to wait before we could enter the Canal. The ship was surrounded by Egyptians in small boats full of leather goods and other souvenirs trying to sell the passengers things through the guardrails. Upon agreement on the price, the money would first go down in a basket on a rope and the bought goods would come back up. I was astonished at the mutual trust between the traders in their little boats and the passengers aboard the ship. Nobody was tricked and no trader escaped in his boat with the money of the passengers. Everybody was warned that the ship would depart again and we were wished a "pleasant journey" in English, French, German and Dutch.

That's how our journey through the Suez Canal started. There was again not much to see, a true desert landscape with regular signposts and a few spread-out date palm trees. The construction of this canal under the lead of the French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps was an admirable achievement. We could also see there had been intense fighting during the war.



Shipwrecks in the canal

In the narrow parts of the canal, where the Germans had sunk Allied ships, the corroding wrecks were pulled ashore in pieces, so that ships could pass. In the lakes of the Suez Canal there were still countless shipwrecks with only the mast, bridge and funnel above the water.

In Port Said we could go ashore a last time and everybody visited Simon Arzt, a beautiful shop where all goods of good quality were sold.

We also entertained ourselves by watching street magicians who were performing shows with living ducklings they would hide under their fez (Egyptian hat), making them disappear and then reappear somewhere else. The comments were amusing too, a mix of Arabic, English and Dutch. We would often hear: "Tjiej, tjiej mijnheer" (cheep cheep Sir) and then we would have to guess under which fez a duckling was hidden. We mostly chose the wrong fez and if we would point out the right fez two ducklings would be hidden underneath. They were skilled magicians and until today, I still don't know how they managed this trick.

The journey through the Mediterranean Sea was calm. The ship navigated close to the coast of Malta which played an important role during the Second World War. To our surprise we stopped in Gibraltar, where we moored. A few government officials approached in a boat and came aboard the ship. We took this opportunity to look out for the city with our binoculars. A few hours later the "Asturias" departed for Southampton, the final destination of our journey.

When we entered the port we encountered "Aquitania", at the time one of the largest ships in the world. With four funnels this white-painted ship was an impressive sight. In Southampton all passengers left the ship, except the Dutch group from Australia who had to wait for the "Johan de Witt" which would bring us to Amsterdam. During this break we were allowed to take shore leave in Southampton.

The city was heavily damaged by the bombings of the Luftwaffe. We visited the cathedral, a beautiful Gothic building, almost destroyed by a direct hit. Everything in the city was neglected, the ruins had not been cleaned yet and the shops were empty. We were wondering: "Is this the land of the conquerors of the Germans?"

With much excitement we saw the "Johan de Witt" enter the port under the Dutch flag. A true Dutch ship and for the first time we would once more be surrounded by only Dutch people. For years we had lived among Japanese, Filipinos, Americans and Australians but now that would change: only fellow countrymen from now on.



Arrival at locks of IJmuiden The Netherlands August 1947

When all the luggage of the “Asturias” was loaded, we departed for the short trip to IJmuiden. The journey through the North Sea channel was unforgettable. For years the Japanese landscape in Nagasaki was grey and colourless anywhere, in Australia it was mostly a grey and light bluish green but here in Holland the landscape was a fresh and clear green in all kinds of nuances. The stunning meadows, the beautiful trees in the middle of summer, we enjoyed it.

To my great joy I was welcomed at the docks by one of my aunts with her daughter, waiting to bring me home to meet my sister Nel. It had been six years since I last saw her.

Chapter 22

Translated by: Sophia Mellink

In the Netherlands



Sister Nel and her daughter Marijke 1947

It was a very moving occasion when after six long and hard years I could finally embrace my sister Nel again. She was but a schoolgirl waving me good-bye on the platform of station Weltevreden when I saw her last. It had been the 15 December 1941; and the train had been bound for Bandung where my mates and I were set to start our military service.

After these six years apart, Nel had also experienced much. First the Japanese invasion; the arrest of our father in the dead of night by the feared Kempei Tai; detention in Kareës, a suburb of Bandung; the death of our father in Soekamisin and later the imprisonment of our mother in the

Banjoe Biroe camp, where she died on 30 August 1945 from malnourishment and total exhaustion.

After the war Nel witnessed the “Bersiap” period when Dutch and Chinese were often viciously attacked by independence activists. She found refuge with an official of Cheribon and eventually married him. When her first daughter, Marijke, was born and the safety of the Dutch decreased she moved back to the Netherlands. Yes, it was right to say that we stayed awake talking all night.

I had to register at the naval base in Doorn and asked what my chances were to receive training to become a pilot. I explained I had been taken prisoner as a trainee pilot. Of course it was impossible to receive an answer straight away: “We will tell you at a later date. For now you may take paid leave for the next month.” And I truly revelled in seeking out my uncles, aunts, grandparents, nieces and nephews again. I went everywhere on my own bike, the Malvern Star from Australia that I had taken with me.

A month later I returned to the base in Doorn and an officer told me I was eligible for flight training in the Naval Air Service but first I had to sign a contract to stay on for another seven years. I didn't feel happy about that. I had already served six years in the Navy and I'd had enough.

I had thought that I would be able to take annual leave but apparently the Navy had other plans for me. As a national serviceman I was considered 'experienced personnel' and such men were needed in the Dutch East Indies.

Ridiculous really because my so-called 'experience' consisted of four years of imprisonment and one year of loading ships in Australian harbours. A week after this my assessment for Indonesia was due. That was something to look forward to! What could I do to stop it from happening? It wasn't like I could suddenly disappear from the face of the earth or find refuge somewhere so I had to think of something else.

I had to try to be disqualified. So I formulated my next plan. I have always had a tinted kind of skin colour, probably from my French forefathers. I also knew that people with liver problems were said to have a yellowish tint to their skin. I decided to start complaining about pain in my liver.

The assessment was an in-depth examination, probably because my

imprisonment in Japan had seen me frequently without much to eat. I told the doctor that I had suffered from pneumonia whilst in the camp as well as diarrhoea and a few months of jaundice. This was all true but when the doctor was examining my stomach with his hands, I complained about the pain in my liver. He found it peculiar, because he couldn't feel anything abnormal and I was healthy and everything seemed to work fine.

He decided that I was best off to go to the military hospital in Utrecht for further examination. This all happened a few days later. The doctors took x-rays but they too didn't show anything out of the ordinary. The doctors then decided that they would take a look at my gallbladder and the functionality of it. That proved to be quite the challenge. I was committed to hospital and forced to fast for twelve hours after which I was told to swallow a tube that would lead through my stomach to the end of my gallbladder. After that I had to lie in bed on an angle of 30 degrees with my head as the lowest point and the end of the tube in a beaker into which the gall slowly trickled.

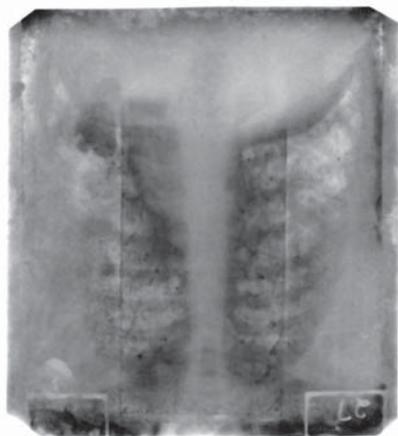
The only thing I could think was, "All of this just to trick some doctors?" It certainly didn't seem worth it at all. To say I was relieved when the nurse finally pulled the tube out of my stomach, set my bed horizontally again and gave me a cup of tea would be an understatement.

I was allowed to go back home the following day until further notice. A week later I had to return to Doorn for the medical report. I was very curious for the result when I entered the doctor's office. The first question was "Do you still feel any pain?" To which I answered "Yes sir, sometimes I can feel a pang of pain." To my great surprise, he said "Well, we weren't able to find anything and everything is fine. You have been accepted for service but we have deduced that you are unable to serve in the tropics."

That truly was music to my ears. My mischievous plans had finally succeeded. The Navy had decided that there were enough young lads in the Netherlands and that they no longer needed me. So on 15 December 1947 I got my discharge from the Navy.

As a free citizen my first priority now was emigration; back to Australia. There was an embassy in The Hague though there was a stipulation. Every candidate for emigration had to hand in an x-ray of the chest. At that time Australia was afraid of the introduction of TB. This was my first problem. My photo showed a blot on the left lung; a

scar from the pneumonia I had survived whilst I had been imprisoned. The doctors in the embassy however thought I suffered from TB and so my chances of emigration went up in smoke.



X ray

I protested strongly against my predicament and finally I was granted the promise that they would re-evaluate my case after six months provided that I brought with me a new set of x-rays.

So I had to fill in these tedious six months. The money that the Navy had given me in compensation for the four years in prison had already been placed in a bank account for my journey back to Australia.

That meant I had to find a job so I could still pay for the costs of living with my aunt in Zeist. My bad luck turned out to be her fortune. In 1947 rationing coupons were still being used for everyday grocery items; milk butter, meat and chocolate. However as a 'TB patient' I didn't have to use them to buy any of the rationed grocery items we needed to eat. We ate like kings very often.

My first job was as a projectionist. I travelled with a man who showed films of the royal family in small villages and large towns around the country. Queen Wilhelmina, Prince Bernhard and Princess Juliana were very popular in those days. Everyone truly loved the royal family. My boss hired halls and rooms, sold tickets and I operated the 16 mm Bell and Howell projector.

Even though it became annoying after a while to watch the same films over and over every night, I did like the fact I we went to a new place every day. I saw much of Overijssel, Gelderland and Drenthe. Our mode of transport was an old Skoda, a rickety thing where everything was broken but one way or another my boss was able to get it running at a reasonable speed. But after multiple weeks of seamless cooperation it became clear that my boss, who was unmarried, demanded more of me than I was able to give. And so I ended up once again in Zeist.

My next job was in Utrecht at a photo developing studio where they developed hundreds of photos of the royal family. The owner was a professional photographer and took many snapshots of the royal family at all sorts of events. Sometimes he returned with outstanding photos which he then turned into thousands of postcards. The Dutch in those days were crazy about anything to do with the royal family and so the shop sold hundreds of beautiful postcards.

Most often I worked in the dark room where every photo was developed by hand. Sometimes I worked all day in the unventilated, humid room with perpetual red light and chemical fumes. On other days I worked in the shop or rode alongside the boss on one of his visits to the palace in Soesterdijk.

The only positive about having this job was the daily cycling trips to Utrecht. In summer this wasn't so bad but once the wind struck up and the rain pelted my face in winter it was miserable.

By this point in time the six months had gone by and I went back to the doctors for my new chest X-ray. They showed that the scar was indeed a scar and not TB. Therefore medically I was eligible for emigration. I filled out all of the necessary papers and brought them in to the embassy, full of apprehension, only to receive another setback. The civil servant had discovered that I had been born in Batavia, in the Dutch East Indies.

Under Australian law a person's nationality was determined by the country in which the individual had been born; not the country of the individual's parents. Batavia now lay in Indonesia and so I was regarded as an Indonesian. That meant that emigration to Australia had become practically impossible because of the "White Australia Policy" that was ruthlessly enforced by immigration minister Arthur Calwell. Persons from Asia and Africa weren't allowed entry!

Of course I protested heavily and told the officer that my father had been born in Brummen (Gelderland) and that my mother came from Amsterdam. I held on by telling the man that my grandparents had been born in Holland also and that I could prove it with photos and evidence from the family tree. Finally the officer acquiesced by telling me to "Go home, get your photos and the family tree and we will consider your case."

Knocked down but not defeated I returned home. And so the scavenger hunt for my family relics was set into motion. The Couvret side

of the family was easy to trace. Uncle Gerard, an attorney, had all the data but mother's side, the Bisschops, weren't as easy. I visited all the available churches and bureaus for the population to chase after the birth, baptising, marital and death records. Gravestones and burial sites were also fantastic places to discover new things. And so I collected the entire family tree and drew it on a large piece of paper nicely decorated with the family coat of arms.

I received the photos of my parents and grandparents quite easily but the photos of my eight great grandparents were more difficult to acquire. I went to visit cousins who I had never seen before. Often they found it quite peculiar to see someone with such an obsession over people who had already been dead for over fifty years. Sometimes my relatives were quite suspicious of me and what I was doing.

Nevertheless I collected all the information I needed. It had taken three complete months to finally get to the point where I was now. I received the photo of the last great grandmother from the captain of a ship that travelled the river Rhine from Rotterdam on its way to Germany. Armed with the photo album and the family tree I returned to the Australian Embassy in The Hague. The officer greeted me with an "Oh, Mr. Couvret, it is you again."

It became apparent that he hadn't forgotten me. He took a look at the family tree that went back to 1681 and showed it to his colleague. He also took a very close look at the photos of my family members. After what seemed like an eternity he spoke the words that would soon find themselves etched into my brain permanently. "Mr Couvret, you certainly are a very persistent man. You have convinced me; you can come to Australia."

My head was in the clouds. I was hired as a ship's carpenter not as a teacher. Priorities were given to farmers, market gardeners and manual labourers. I stated that I had already clocked three years of experience as prisoner in a Japanese shipyard. That was good enough.

I had to organise the trip to Australia myself. Flying was way too expensive; I didn't have money for that, so I had to travel by ship. But passage was difficult to achieve and I had to wait for three months to get a place on the 'Volendam' which was due to leave on 11 December 1948.

Financially I hadn't been prepared for that, because my money had run out so I had to find a new job. Luckily I was hired almost immediately

as a tour guide who would lead the tourists around the Gero silver factory in Zeist. The work was very nice and interesting. In my free time I often visited the gymnastics club 'Eros' and the athletics club in Zeist. The highlight of my training with this club was the competition for the district championship at the end of the season.

The committee had invited the ladies team for the 4x100 relay led by Fanny Blankerskoen to race against our men's team. The ladies had just returned from the Olympic Games in London. Hundreds of spectators came to Zeist, especially to see the race. Unfortunately for us our men's team, of which I was also a part, were absolutely pummelled into the ground, to the public's great entertainment. We felt very embarrassed.



Reunion

Early in December 1948 came the day of embarkation. Looking back, I had spent a fantastic eighteen months back home with my sister Nel and her baby Marijke. I had met the entire family and many friends from the school days in Indonesia. We had a fantastic reunion in The Hague where unfortunately some boys were missing because they hadn't survived the war.

I had seen a lot of the Netherlands. I had cycled everywhere. Trips through the tulip fields were definitely the most beautiful rides. The winter had also had its attractions with ice skating on the large open-air ice rink somewhere near Zeist. But that was all behind me now and I walked confidently in the direction of my new future - a future in Australia.

Chapter 23

Translated by: Naomi van Loon

Back to Australia – and the Start of a New Life

On 11 December 1948, I boarded the “Volendam”. During the war this passenger ship of the ‘Holland-Amerika’ line was used to transport troops; now it was being used to send emigrants to Australia. The ship was jam-packed with inadequate onboard facilities. Meals were often scanty and we were left to ourselves for any form of amusement. The confined space meant very little was organised for us. Our long days were spent playing cards, reading and writing. Most of us stoically accepted the situation knowing that our journey would last only a few weeks. The Promised Land was awaiting us at the end of our journey, the place where we would build a new future.

After a rather boring journey we docked, first at Freemantle, where many passengers and their offspring would start their new lives in Western Australia. From there we departed for Melbourne and the rest of us landed in Sydney Harbour.

I will never forget our arrival. It was early in the morning when we approached the harbour entrance walled by the high rocks of North and South Head. Our ship moved slowly towards Circular Quay past Shark Island and Clark Island. Everybody was lined up along the railing to see the colourful shores with beautiful houses and scenic beaches followed by rocks and forests. I saw Rose Bay, our Catalina base and

the mansion "Ardenbraught" high on Point Piper where I had lived for eighteen months as a sailor. Upon changing course Sydney Harbour Bridge appeared, a magnificent sight.

Awaiting me on the dock to pick me up was the Matson family - Oscar Matson, a shipwright, his wife Florence and their daughter Venla. The Matsons had promised the Australian government that they would support and shelter me. They lived in Miranda, a Sydney suburb. Oscar and his brother Fred, also a shipwright, owned a large shed along Kareena Road in Miranda which they used to build rowing boats and small sailing craft.

The first Saturday after my arrival the shed was decorated. Tables and chairs with dishes full of food and sweets replaced the boats under construction. About a hundred people had been invited for a "Welcome Back to Australia" function. Grandfather Matson and Fred played the accordion and everyone was singing famous songs I had to learn too. That party lasted well into the night and from that point I was sure I was welcome.

But I didn't migrate to Australia to party, I had come to work. Before the war I had been educated to become a teacher and I had qualifications in Physical Education and Drawing. So I went to the headquarters of the NSW Department of Education in Bridge Street, Sydney. I spoke to a civil servant who sat at his desk. I told him about my education and asked if there were any openings available. I will never know why but he said "No, we don't have a job for you, we have enough teachers."

It might have been for personal reasons or perhaps he couldn't place my accent but he rejected me. It was only afterwards that I got to know he had not been authorised to reject me and that there was actually a huge shortage of teachers.

Meanwhile I had to find something else to do. I bought a copy of the Sydney Morning Herald, the biggest newspaper in Sydney. It was packed with hundreds of openings for all kinds of professions and jobs. As my immigration documents stated I was a shipwright I wanted to find a job in that industry. According to the newspaper there would be good prospects at a shipyard in Newcastle.

I got on the train to Newcastle with the intention of finding a job there. At the shipyard office I was interviewed but I had a feeling they weren't particularly interested in an immigrant. My chances of getting hired

seemed even less when they heard I had worked in education and gained my experience in Japan.

Nevertheless I was invited to visit the shipyard. I noticed how little work actually was being done there. Only one in three men were working, while two out of three were just standing around chatting until it was their turn to do something. There was a one-hour lunch break in the afternoon during which all work came to a halt.

I joined one of the groups in a pub full of dock workers. I was absolutely shocked by the amount of beer everyone was drinking; how could those men work through the afternoon after drinking so much alcohol?

That evening as I made my way back to Sydney by train I was pondering the difference between working at the Japanese docks in Nagasaki and the one in Newcastle. In Japan everybody worked very hard, firstly because they wanted to win the war and secondly because they were afraid of the 'kaiguns', Japanese Marine overseers who would treat anyone working too slow with a few strokes of a stick.

I also figured I'd probably get very bored if I'd been working at the dock in Newcastle. I'm just not one to sit still, you see. Besides, I would rather stay in Miranda than find new lodgings. So I bought another Sydney Morning Herald full of pages with 'Vacant Positions'. As I had more or less worked as the photographer at the Point Piper base and as I had honed my photography skills in Utrecht I checked out the many openings in that area.

That is how I landed a job at Sydney Photo Works as 'supervisor of the dark room', where they enlarged regular photos. The company had many branches throughout Sydney where customers brought their films for development and enlargement. I called and the boss was pleased to accept me as he had been advertising for weeks without success. The business was based in Grafton Street, a street parallel to Broadway (a main street in the City), about ten minutes walking distance from Central Station. It was ideal, that way I could take the train every day from Miranda to the City.

I worked at Sydney Photo Works for a few months. It was interesting to see what kind of photos people generally wanted to have enlarged. Mostly it was pictures of babies and children. Then it would be a picture of grandmother, in third place was the girlfriend and finally there would be photos of dogs and cats. You'd often see Sydney

Harbour Bridge in the background but the big clock made from plants at Taronga Zoo was another favourite.

But not everyone was an artist; I developed a few unfortunate pictures of a sweet-looking grandmother with a bin in the background! The most difficult enlargements were those with bad quality negatives. If the photo was out of focus there really wasn't much that could be done. Photos that were under- or overexposed could be fixed but it would take ages to do so.

For me as an immigrant the weekends were something very special. I grew up with half Saturdays and Sundays off but here in Australia we had two full days off! I used those two days to the fullest. The Matsons had their own cabin cruiser which was anchored in Yowie Bay. We took it out almost every week and we would often spend the night on the boat as it was equipped with beds.

Oscar and Fred Matson knew all the favourite spots for various fish varieties in Port Hacking, a wide delta south of Sydney. They knew exactly what time the fish would bite and what to attach to the hook: worms, shrimps, mackerel, or green seaweed. We would always return with a boat full of fish enough for one or two meals.

I also became a member of the Saint George athletics club. I remember a fellow I used to train with, Kevin Gosper. He would later participate in the Olympics. I would play ice hockey on Sundays at the 'Ice Palais' an ice court next to the Sydney Showground. Of course now it is long gone but back then it was a lot of fun participating in this speedy sport! I also went ice-skating and ice-dancing once a week with Venla Matson at the Glaciarium, a beautiful ice rink in George Street opposite Central Station.

I was living a very good life. But the Good Lord had something else in mind for me! One weekend in May 1949 the Matsons organised a BBQ to which the neighbours were invited. The wife of one of the neighbours had a brother who was head of the elementary school in Sans Souci, a neighbourhood in South Sydney.

After we had been talking for a long time, he looked at me in surprise, wondering how I knew so much about education. When I explained to him that I was actually a teacher but that I had been rejected by a civil servant at the Department of Education who had told me there were enough teachers, he said: "What nonsense! Would you like to be a teacher again? I can definitely get you a position; let me arrange it for you."

So I accepted his offer and a week later I received a telegram saying that I was appointed as a teacher at an elementary school at the Cowra Migrant Centre, about 320 kilometres west of Sydney, in the outback. That is how I started my career at the Department of Education, for which I worked for 33 years.

In 1949 Cowra was a small city with 6,000 inhabitants, on the Lachlan River. Back then it was the centre of a well-to-do agricultural district with livestock, sheep for wool and meat and wheat. Along the river there were wide meadows with all kinds of vegetables that were tinned at the Edgells factory. During the War the soldiers in the South Pacific were provided with these vegetables.

During the war two large army camps had been built, one of which was a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp. There more than a thousand Japanese and a few hundred Italians were guarded. The Italians were taken prisoner in North Africa; the Japanese of the army, air force and navy were picked up in the Pacific. The Italians were very easy to deal with, they were happy to be in Cowra instead of the desert of Libya. They volunteered to work at the farms and acres of Edgells. They were good workers and the farmers were very satisfied about their work. Not a single Italian tried to escape.

It was a different story for the Japanese. According to the Bushido tradition everybody should have fought until death but somehow they were taken prisoner - a big humiliation for the Japanese. That's why the leaders decided they would all try to escape.

At 0130 in the middle of the night on 5 August 1944, at the sound of a trumpet, all Japanese stormed out of the barracks. Armed with table knives that had been fashioned into daggers they attacked the machine gun post. The Australians kept shooting until the Japanese reached them and stabbed them all to death. Other POWs threw blankets over the barbed wire fence and climbed over it. They disappeared into the dark night.

231 Japanese were killed, 108 wounded and 334 escaped. Over the next few days all escapees were found again. Some committed suicide. This outbreak was the largest escape attempt in military history.

The other army camp was used for the training of soldiers before going to the front. When the war was over, the camp was closed and that later turned out to be a solution for the Department of Immigration. In Western Europe there were tens of thousands of adults and children

who had fled the communist countries of Eastern Europe. Above all, there were thousands of forced labourers from Poland, Yugoslavia and the Ukraine who were sent to Germany during the Nazi regime to work in the factories and who didn't want to return after the war.

Chapter 24

Translated by: Jaap Frederiks

Cowra Migrant Centre

Exactly on my birthday, on 5 June 1949, I arrived at Cowra Migrant Centre and started my career as a schoolteacher. The head of school was glad to see me because there was a serious shortage in teaching staff. All newly arrived children had to get an education and I ended up with 45 children in a grade 5 class. The staff consisted of four Australian young ladies and a young man, all of them recent graduates but not at all prepared for a situation like the Migrant Centre public school. On top of this there were two colleagues from Poland, one from Estonia - and then there was me.

We all spoke English but the children only spoke Polish, Ukrainian or one of the Baltic languages. With gestures, pictures and drawings on a blackboard we soon succeeded in giving them a wider English vocabulary. When we were teaching them verbs, we were like actors on a stage. How else to convey the meaning of walking, swimming, thinking, kicking, stealing, eating and drinking?

We really performed miracles. In three months' time these children could speak English fluently and they acted as interpreters for their mothers when they went shopping in town. It gave us enormous satisfaction. It showed what dedication could produce.

Teaching other subjects was much easier. The children were very good at maths and we loved singing together. They were very talented. Drawing class was special too and some children were real artists. Geography and history only became a priority after they had picked up sufficient English.

In the beginning we had to work in rather primitive conditions. The school basically consisted of former army barracks, built in two rows. Each building was about 30 metres long and 10 metres wide, a wooden skeleton with corrugated iron walls and a roof made of asbestos. It had plain wooden floorboards and during the first few months there was no false ceiling. The children sat at tables with fixed benches. As a teacher we had a table, a chair and a cupboard in which we could store text books, notebooks, pencils and such. Most helpful was a blackboard on an easel and a box of coloured chalk.

There were no walls between the classes. We had to put the groups of children of each grade back to back, so they could not see each other. They were however able to hear what was going on in the classes further down. So when we were singing with one class the other class could be doing maths or creative skills. A few months later the separations and ceilings arrived, so in the end we had real classrooms.

Cowra has a rough climate. It is a cold place in winter with temperatures falling well below zero at night and a white frozen landscape at dawn. In summer temperatures are in the upper thirties and occasionally well over 40 degrees. Each classroom had a cast-iron wood burner to keep us warm in winter. Early in the morning in the freezing cold we had to chop the wood ourselves, just before the children arrived at school. The men had to cut the wood for the lady teachers as well who really appreciated this. On cold winter mornings we told the kids to sit around the hot stove in groups of ten, rotating the groups so that everyone got to warm up. Sometimes it was so cold that the outdoor drinking water dispensers were still frozen during the 11 o'clock break.

No teacher nowadays would even consider working in these conditions. But we gladly rose to the challenge, inspired by our head master Mr Beale and we remember those years with pleasure and satisfaction. The number of pupils at the school steady increased and by the end of the year we had 840 boys and girls, ranging from five to twelve years old and a staff of 33. Children over twelve took the bus to the local high school in town, about five km from the Migrant Centre.

The Department of Immigration saw to it that we had appropriate housing. A few army cabins were turned into bedrooms into which they put a metal bed frame, a horsehair mattress with sheets and a few grey blankets. Each bedroom had a table, a chair and a wardrobe. In a nearby cabin with a huge fireplace we had a recreation room where we also had our meals. During the winter months we would sit around the fire and talk deep into the night.

The showers, toilets and laundry were in yet another cabin. Not a very practical arrangement when you had to go during a rainy winter night. Our housing was Spartan but we did not mind. We were young and it was cheap and close to the school. This way I managed to save money for my flying lessons in a Tiger Moth at the Cowra Aero Club and I wanted to buy a car.

The Cowra Migrant Centre was an interesting social and economic experiment. After the Australian government had decided to offer European "displaced persons" a new future down under, it leased a number of large ships. Several Dutch ships were among them: the Johan van Oldenbarneveldt, the Volendam and the Sibajek.

Thousands of migrants came to Australia onboard these ships, in particular families with children. For a family the passage from Europe to Australia was free of charge. Upon arrival every man was guaranteed a job for two years but in return he had to sign a contract obliging him to accept any job the government would assign to him.

There was a shortage of labour in the Newcastle and Wollongong steel plants, at the Sydney Chullora rail maintenance workshop, at the Snowy mountains hydro-electrical project and the irrigation schemes at Cooma. But in these places there were no facilities for women and children so they all ended up in abandoned army camps such as the Cowra Migrant Centre.

Each weekend the husband would take the train to Cowra and visit his family. Typically several hundred of them would spend the Friday night and Sunday night on the 'clockwinders train'. They were quite a handful for the local police when they arrived at Cowra station on Saturday morning, often loud and drunk.

Most men brought along their weekly wages. This was good news for the Cowra shopkeepers. They sold new clothes, radios, blankets, electric pans and more that made life at the Centre enjoyable. The Cowra economy had collapsed at the end of the war. The expenditures

by the 2,000 soldiers at the training facility and subsequently by the 2,000 POWs dried up when the camp was abandoned. The Migrant Centre turned the tide. Shopkeepers did their utmost to cater for the newly arrived and the cafes and milk bars did good business. Many migrants were keen to have a change from the dull canteen menus.

Camps exclusively for women and children produced particular problems of their own but the Australian government managed to deal with these quite well. All army camps had a similar layout. To make them less vulnerable to air raids, they had used huge areas and built the barracks in blocks of twenty spread out across the land. Cowra had eight blocks of twenty buildings, interconnected with asphalt roads. It was quite a walk to cross the entire camp from one side to the other.

The camp was a self-supporting unit. It had its own hospital, movie theatre, sports grounds and a shop. Each block had its own kitchen, mess room, recreation hall, showers and toilets. Block F was the admin centre. A large staff was required to run the place.

A former army man, Colonel Andrews was in charge of the camp. He was assisted by a few other Australians. Col. Andrews demanded military discipline and obedience. Most of the camp maintenance and work in the kitchen was done by the newly arrived migrants themselves. Andrews' attitude caused a lot of strains and his staff got to be known as the Gestapo. Col. Andrews' measures had little impact on us teachers since we did not report to him but to the Department of Education.

One of the unforeseen problems was the inevitable popularity of some of the young women. They had not gone unnoticed by the boys and young men in Cowra town. Quite a few of the displaced persons were only nominally married; they had transacted a marriage of convenience, just to better qualify in the selection procedures. They had agreed that once in Australia each partner would go his own way. Many women were keen to find an Australian husband. It got to a point where the number of night-time visitors left the camp directors no other choice but to impose a curfew.

They issued an access pass to everyone living in the camp. Checkpoints with a boom gate were built at the two entrances. A record was kept of each car that entered the camp. Non-residents had to get a visitor's pass. We felt offended by these measures that constituted an invasion of privacy. Teachers who used their own cars ignored the imposed restrictions and in the end staff at the school

managed to get a formal waiver.

The night-time visitors did decrease in numbers but of course it was impossible to effectively patrol the camp's borders. Adventurous lovers continued to stroll across the fields and into the centre, much to Col Andrews' dismay. In response he set up a kind of secret police force. On a bicycle and armed with a torch these men patrolled the camp at night to stop uninvited visitors. We at the school had a good laugh about all this.

Several women had great musical talents. Some had worked as singers and pianists before the war or played the violin. Folk dancing was a popular pastime as well. Occasionally the cinema's stage was used for a music recital, a great event that attracted many people from Cowra too.

I could fill an entire book recalling the events at the camp and at the school but I should rather focus on my own biography. Cowra Centre was an important milestone in my life. I can see a golden thread woven through my life. One of the teachers in Cowra Centre put it like this: "God holds on to a golden thread and it is up to each and every one of us to hold on to it or let go".

Chapter 25

Translated by: Fiona Poot

No longer alone

Not one of the teachers of the Cowra Migrant Centre Public School was married and it was not long before we received the first invitations to parties, dinner or an evening at the cinema. We met the Cowra-dwellers in the church on Sunday, in stores, in milk bars and cafes. They were very friendly and welcoming and I was often invited to meet the parents of girls with whom I went out. In rural areas educators, teachers and young people who worked at a bank were always considered to be very suitable by parents for their young unmarried sons and daughters. So we went every Saturday and Sunday from the camp to town and the surrounding area for entertainment.

I met a few farmers who had suffered from a plague of rabbits. The rabbits ate all the grass so there was little left for the sheep and other livestock. They also suffered from foxes that killed newborn lambs. I was allowed to shoot rabbits and foxes, so I bought my first shotgun.

In those days it was easy to buy guns and bullets - you didn't need a permit. This began my hobby as a hunter and I still regularly hunt but the game now consists of wild boar, foxes and wild cats. These cats bring great harm to the Australian nature. Several birds and small animals are almost extinct because they are eaten by cats.



Hunting shots
(see comments previous page)

Back to the school. By the end of August 1949 I was on a break in the staff room when one of my colleagues, Martin, came and said. "Hey guys, there's just a new teacher arrived; you should definitely go see, she's a real beauty!" I asked: "Where is she now?" Martin said: "She's with the head teacher talking in his office". Curious, I left my coffee and walked across the playground in the direction of the office of the "boss".

And as if it was meant to be, out of the office came Hilja Seltam and we were introduced. I will never forget the first time I saw her. She had a friendly

pretty face with blue eyes, beautiful blond curls and an attractive pink complexion. She was dressed in a dark blue skirt and a white blouse with a red embroidered pattern around her neck. She was a bit shy and said very politely: "How do you do? Pleased to meet you." And then she went to the kindergarten classes where she would teach. I did not know then that this young lady would be my wife two years later; that we would have four healthy handsome sons, ten grandchildren and that we would share the next sixty years of our lives together.

The arrival of a new staff member was always interesting. This time it was very special because she was a beautiful young lady. All the single men tried to get her attention, especially Martin, an Australian, myself, a Dutchman and Arvo, an Estonian. Hilja herself was Estonian so Martin and I thought our chances were not favourable. Still, I managed to invite her out to the annual Anglican Church Ball. It was held in a large ballroom in the city. Here another surprise awaited me: Hilja was an excellent dancer. She slid light as a feather on the dance floor. Later I heard they had a lot of dancing practice before the war. She liked this ball so much she intimated she would come along to the next ball.

Every city held at least four balls. We had the Scottish Ball, complete with kilts and bagpipes, the Catholic Church Ball, the Anglican Church Ball and the Bachelor and Spinsters Ball. All residents went to every

ball. Hilja and I found it all great fun and we danced all night long, often until well after midnight. It was assumed that we were a couple.

Transport between the camp and the city was always a problem. The camp bus did not drive in the evening. I had a bike but you could not use it to go to a ball so I decided to buy a car.

But you need money for that and with my salary it would have to take a while before I could save enough. I had to earn extra money, so I started teaching English to women in the camp two nights a week from seven till nine pm.

That was well paid and it was nice work, much appreciated by the ladies who understood that it was important for the future to be able to speak and understand the language of their new homeland. I also earned good money from shooting rabbits. The fields around the camp barracks swarmed with these animals as soon as it got dark. A friend lent me six rabbit traps. I would put them up in the early evening and at ten o'clock I went round to collect the loot, finish them off and then skin them. The skins were stretched on thick iron wire to dry.

The stores where farmers could buy everything bought these rabbit skins. They were used as fur (Lapin they called it) for felt hats like the famous Australian Akubra Hat. I used to get seven shillings and six-pence a pound (half a kilogram) for the skins. There were about seven skins in a pound so they were a good source of income.

In the summer holidays from mid-December to late January I earned good money. The first few weeks I helped with the wheat harvest. Everyone in town was involved.

At that time a tractor pulled the harvester. At the corners of large fields the tractor would stop to fill big bags of wheat from the hopper. When they were empty, the tractor would drive around again for the next round and we had to sew the filled bags with a large needle and thick twine. By the end of the day the full bags were loaded onto a truck. We did this together, counting: "One, two and three!" as we rocked the bags back and forth in our arms and released them on the count of three.

The first layer was easy but the second layer on top was much more difficult. In those days we had no automatic lifting appliances everything went with muscle strength. Farmers were tough guys. The harvest was hard work. I worked harder here than in Japan as a prisoner.

But the delicious food at the farm where I stayed made it all worthwhile and I learned some new skills like driving a tractor or a heavily loaded truck on a site without a paved road, sewing bags and how and where to look out for brown snakes. But above all it paid better than teaching.

In January I worked to harvest asparagus which was widely grown in the Cowra district. I knew nothing of how and where asparagus was grown and how it was harvested. I soon learned a key fact - it had to be taken very early in the morning from the ground when the shaft was still soft from the morning dew. This meant that we had to be up at first light to start harvesting at five o'clock in the morning and work until nine when the asparagus was too dry to pick.



All dressed up

We worked in teams of eight and the whole team was paid for the weight of asparagus they had harvested. If someone worked too slowly, he or she was replaced. All the work was done with a bent back and that caused back pain. For the first few days I could hardly stand up. But it was worth it. Asparagus was an expensive vegetable and harvesting it paid well. The entire crop went to the Edgell factory where the asparagus were canned.

With all the extra income I received I got the money together for a small car. At that time there was not much choice. There were only three cars for sale: the Morris Minor, the Ford Prefect and the Austin A-40. I found the Austin A-40 the best and so I

became the proud owner of my first car. The colour was beige and the number plate was EL-672. All people can remember the license plate of their first car. I also started my training as an amateur mechanic. This car, a four-seater, opened up a much larger world for me and my girlfriend Hilja. We could now travel much further from home. We went to dances in other places, 40 to 60 km from Cowra, such as Young, Orange, Canowindra and Grenfell. Fifteen minutes drive from

Cowra was a large irrigation dam built at Wyangala in the Lachlan River. There was a large lake where you could swim, canoe, sail and water-ski. Occasionally, we went for a whole weekend to Sydney for a night at the Tivoli, a famous theatre fifty years ago.



Cowra

Pre-war she lived in Estonia with her parents, a sister and a brother. When the Russians conquered the Baltic States, her family fled to Germany, just before the Russians sent tens of thousands of people to Siberia. After the war they would not return to Soviet occupied Estonia under Soviet occupation and immigrated to Australia, where they arrived on board the "Svalbard" in May 1949. They lived in the Cowra camp.

My relationship with Hilja strengthened. We went everywhere together and with time grew closer together. We had many things in common: we were both raised by European parents, family ties were very strong, we loved children, we wanted to dance and we both had lost our homes and country of birth. A big difference was that Hilja's family had survived the war.



**Paul and Hilja at Wyangala Dam
Summer 1953**

On my 28th birthday I became aware that most men my age were already married and the prospect of having a family with kids seemed attractive to me. I admired Hilja for the sweet way she interacted with the children in her class and she was also very kind to me and I came to the realisation that she would be a very good mother. I became aware that I was actually alone.

I did have a few good friends but no family. My sister, cousins, uncles and aunts and grandmother all lived in faraway Holland, on the other side of the world.

So I decided to share my life with Hilja and I proposed to her. I was over the moon when she said "yes". We always spoke English because she could not speak Dutch and I knew no Estonian. The next day I went



Austin A40

to visit Hilja's parents who lived in another part of the camp. In the old-fashioned way, I asked her father for the hand of his eldest daughter. He was very happy and hugged me spontaneously which meant a lot to me. Her mother was also very pleased.



The next day at school in the staff room we announced that we were engaged and the headmaster, Mr Beale, came up with glasses of champagne. Everyone drank to wish us a good future gave us their blessing. We decided that we would marry in early spring vacation so we could spend fourteen days on our honeymoon. Indeed my appointment at the Cowra Migrant Centre was a turning point in my life. Without this camp I would never have met Hilja. I still think that God willed it so.

Chapter 26

Translated by: Aniek Modder

A home and a new career



Wedding picture

We chose Saturday 25 August 1951 for our wedding day and were joined in matrimony by the Minister of the Saint Peter Presbyterian Church. I went to church there regularly because the service and the dogma of the Presbyterian Church was comparable to that of the Dutch Reformed Church.

It was only a small wedding with Hilja's parents and a few friends as our guests and they came to our recently bought house after the service. We had a lovely meal with some drinks and headed on our honeymoon to Brisbane and the Gold Coast the next day, a distance of 1,000 km. I had rented a small caravan for two which I had hooked onto

my reliable Austin A-40. We didn't want to stay in a hotel every night because everyone could see we were newlyweds.

We drove inland to Brisbane and came back on the Pacific Highway along the coast. It was a beautiful journey at the beginning of spring with a lot of natural scenery and it confirmed our beliefs that we had settled ourselves in a beautiful country. Sixty years ago the roads were quite primitive and between Sydney and Brisbane there were several rivers that we had to cross by ferry for which you sometimes had to wait hours. But we thought that it was all very adventurous.

After the holiday we found ourselves back into reality in Cowra as teachers at the Migrant Centre School but we were no longer living at the camp. We drove the car every morning from town to the camp. And we came back to our own home every afternoon which we shared with Hilja's parents. It was an old house with half an acre of gardens where we grew our own vegetables and fruits. Hilja's father built a chicken coop so we always had fresh eggs. He was very clever with his tools, he was a carpenter, bricklayer, plumber, electrician and painter in his spare time and so he decided to build extra rooms on two sides of our house.

Bricks for the walls were very expensive because there was a great shortage of bricks and you had to wait months to get them delivered. But there was a solution: we made our own bricks from cement. I designed a wooden frame with which we started the production of hundreds of bricks. We worked every weekend and when we had enough bricks we started building the two extra rooms onto our house, complete with windows, doors and an iron roof with gutters to fill the rainwater tank.

Encouraged by the success of the first two rooms, my father-in-law built another two rooms on the other side of the house. His work was of a good quality - fifty years later the house was still standing on Hartley Street in West Cowra and there were still people living there.

The conditions in those first few years were very primitive compared with today. We had a freezer but no refrigerator and we cooked on a wood stove. We had a fireplace and a petroleum heater during the winter and an electric fan to cool off in the summer. We didn't have a washing machine but once a week we would light up the fireplace and put a big copper vessel on it in which we would put all the laundry with soap which was cut off a long bar. Powder soap wasn't introduced till later.

The laundry was then rinsed out in a tray before all the clothes and bedding were fed between two rollers of a mangle machine to squeeze some water out after which everything was hung on the clothesline to dry. Centrifuges were not yet invented. Warm water for a bath or a shower would have to be boiled first. We had a “chip heater” in the bathroom, a type of heater that you would fill up with woodchips and small branches and would give enough warm water for a bath.

We had no plumbing but all the water from the bathtub was drained to the vegetable garden with a rubber pipe. Without plumbing there was no toilet in the house. Instead it was located in a little cabin in the backyard, twenty metres away from the house. A truck from the council would come by every week to pick up the bucket and replace it with a clean one. It was primitive but hundreds of people in Cowra lived in houses without plumbing.

Despite the fact that we were living as pioneers we were grateful that we lived in our own house. I had lived in camps, tents and barracks in Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, the Netherlands and Australia and now I finally had a home again. Somewhere where we could be alone with our family and do our own thing.

There was no TV but we would listen to the radio and on the weekends we would play cards or chess in the evenings or we got into a good book. I bought a piano for Hilja’s birthday because she could play beautifully. We lived a simple lifestyle but we enjoyed our independence.

But still we thought about our future as well. I found teaching a fulfilling job that gave me great satisfaction. But I didn’t have a permanent position. The Department of Education in New South Wales had appointed me as a “Conditional Certificated – Grade 4” teacher. I would have to pass exams in four subjects before I could receive the New South Wales permanent certificate. After that I could be appointed to a permanent position. I heard that many teachers had failed one, two, or three subjects during the exams but they were still hired for a temporary position. If you failed all four subjects you would have to go back to training college.

I asked the head teacher for advice and he told me that most candidates would take an exam for one subject per year. In my case that would mean that if I were to pass, I could get appointed to a permanent position after four years. This would mean a job for life, a higher salary, a pension at sixty and the possibility of healthcare. I didn’t want

to wait four years. I read a few exam papers from previous years and I thought I remembered everything from my time at training college ten years earlier.

So I told the head teacher I wanted to take the exam in all four subjects at the end of the year. He tried to convince me that I had no chance of passing all of them in only one year. And my best bet would be to try at most two subjects in one year. But after pushing through my wishes I was enrolled for four exams. I could hear him mumbling: "Those stubborn Dutch think that they know everything better".

I could choose the four subjects myself. I had passed the gymnastics and art courses when I was at the CMS (school paper) thanks to my extra lessons from Mr. De Haan and Mr. Den Hartog, so I choose those two. The third choice was German, my best foreign language and the fourth subject was teaching I didn't have to study much; I just needed to learn a bit about Australian pedagogy and Australian painters and artists. I had to travel to Sydney for the exams which would take 2.5 to 3 hours each.

I will never forget the German exam. I completed the test in 1.5 hours and asked the examiner if I could hand it in and go home. He was a really nice, sympathetic man and he thought I had given up hope and desperately wanted to leave, so he tried to encourage me "Don't give up, Sir, read the assignment, two or three times and maybe then you'll understand what you need to do. You still have a whole hour to improve your work". But I was certain that everything was correct, so I left.

End of January was when the results came through. To the amazement of the head teacher I had passed all four subjects! I immediately filed an application to be appointed permanently. But the pranksters at the head office of the Department of Education thought of another obstacle. I had to be tested by the inspector to prove that my English was fluent and that I knew Australian literature. I started a dispute with the officials at the head office and asked them: "How could I have passed four subjects if I didn't comprehend the English language?" Despite my reasoning I still had to take the exam. This meant a further delay to being appointed permanently.

The Inspector of Education, Mr Waterhouse, lived in Orange, a city two and a half hours away by car but reachable within half an hour by small plane. However I didn't know how to reach the inspector's office after landing at the airstrip. So I called him and said that I would be

arriving by plane. He replied saying: "That's not possible; there is no airline that flies to Orange". I told him: "I'm flying my own Tiger Moth", "Oh....." said the inspector and after a long pause "Then I'll come pick you up with the car".

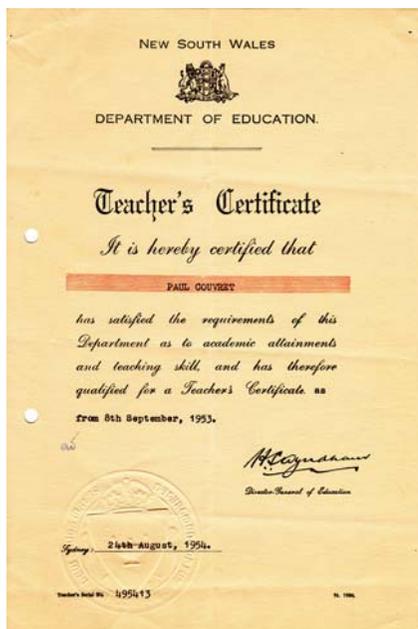
So I flew to Orange a few days later, where Mr Waterhouse was waiting at the airstrip. He was very interested in my Tiger Moth from the Cowra Aero Club and he told me to my surprise that he had served in England during the war as a navigator on Lancaster bombers over Germany. The exam was supposed to take three hours but we had already talked about our experiences during the Second World War for two and a half hours. The last half an hour was spent on Australian literature. It was no surprise that the inspector, shortly before I took off in my Tiger Moth told me: "I will recommend you for a permanent position. Good Luck".

Because I was good at sports and gymnastics I was appointed as a sports teacher for the entire school. That meant that the entire school had to engage in some kind of sports on Wednesday afternoon. So we played soccer, netball, athletics, gymnastics, cricket, softball, tennis and other games for the junior classes. The kids enjoyed it a lot but it was difficult to get full cooperation from some of the old fashioned teachers that didn't want to waste class time on sports. They thought that time should be spent on reading, writing and maths. Luckily my enthusiasm was contagious so I ended up getting full cooperation. The head of the school was very charmed by my program.

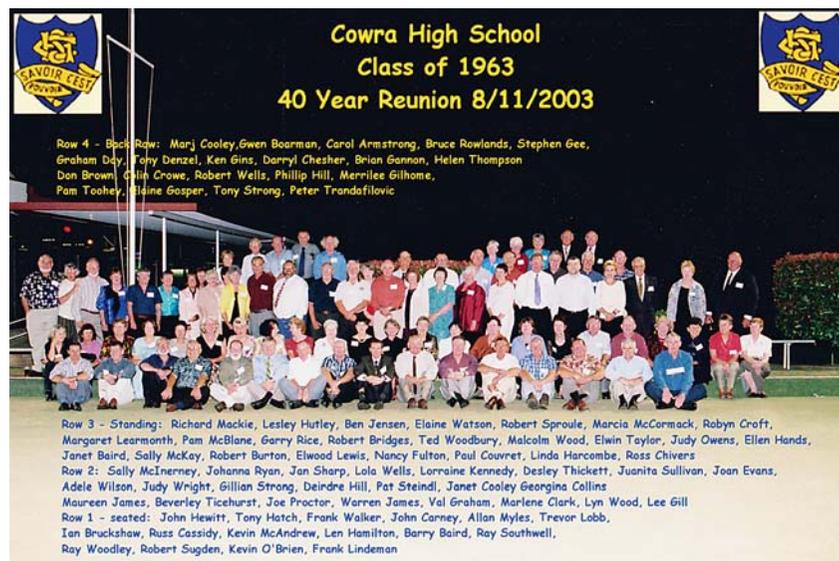
In 1954 the school was inspected by a group of inspectors. One of them was Mr Rod Murdoch who was the inspector for physical education. When he came to question me about my organization of sports at school, I made a good impression and he asked me: "How come you know so much about sports and gymnastics?" I explained to him that I had passed my physical education diploma at the training school (in Batavia). Then he asked me: "But why aren't you a teacher at the High School? Would you like to teach there?" It is weird how someone says something in your life which you will never forget. Those few words gave my life a new direction.

In February 1955 I became a Physical Education teacher at the Cowra High School. I became known for my new ideas and organizing skills and was elected as an athletics manager for the Olympic Games in Melbourne in 1956. I received a "golden pass" which meant that I had free access everywhere. It was the biggest spectacle I've ever been to.

My experience as a gymnastics teacher was to eventually lead me in 1966 to the training school for teachers in Sydney, a department of the campus at the University of Sydney, as a physical education teacher.



Teachers certificate 1954 Cowra



Cowra high school class 1963 40 years reunion 8 November 2003

Chapter 27

Translated by: Yvonne Davis

An Interesting life In Cowra

For most people social life in Cowra revolved around membership of various clubs. There were many different types of sports clubs you could join. Golf, tennis, netball, hockey and lawn bowls were very popular. Those who would rather be alone could go hunting, shooting or fishing. Many people were also interested in all types of arts: amateur theatre, singing in a choir, drawing and painting. Playing cards and billiards were for those who were no longer active.

It wasn't long before I played tennis regularly with a group of friends every Friday evening. I also joined a swimming club and almost every weekend in summer there were competitions against other towns. Sometimes we would travel 100 kilometres to another place for the championships.

Cowra also had a lively basketball competition with something like 12 teams. Some teachers from the High School also wanted to join in, so I set up our own team. I don't know whose idea it was but we were called the "Pirates". Our uniform was black pants with black shirt, white skull and crossbones. Our team never got to be champions but we really enjoyed playing in the competition.

In the 50's there was an organization called "Apex" which was trying to form clubs everywhere. The purpose of Apex was the assist in the

community, to support charitable works and to promote ethical norms in all our tasks. In Europe at that time there was a similar organisation called the Round Table. Membership was only for young men between 18 to 40 years. At the age of 40 you had to retire.

In Cowra an Apex club was established and received its charter in 1953. I became a member and I think back with great pleasure and satisfaction of the many projects the Apex club of Cowra undertook to assist people in times of need. Many projects were simple but useful. One I remember well was the collection and distribution firewood to seniors so they could keep warm in the winter.

One of the club members had a large farm with numerous unwanted dead trees on it. One Sunday morning about 30 "Apexians" arrived at the farm with trucks and saws to collect firewood. The first task was to fell the dead trees. This was done with a 'Hargan' saw connected to a tractor and able to cut the trees just above the ground. It was exciting to see a large tree fall to the ground with a cracking noise: the earth shook under your feet as the tree came down.

After that we cut the tree trunk into blocks with 2 metre-long 'cross-cut' saws with a man at each end. It was hard work but worth the effort when you saw the grateful faces of the old people when we dropped off the firewood. But this day a big surprise awaited us when the next tree came down. We hadn't noticed that there was a bees' nest higher up in its hollow trunk. When the nest fell onto the ground the bees came out angrily to attack us.

All thirty of us ran in all directions to escape the swarm. Most found shelter in the cabins of the trucks and we saw the last four dive into an empty truck quickly shutting the door with a loud bang. Five seconds later the door opened again and the four men ran off in different directions. The swarm had apparently entered through an open window. Not surprisingly these four workers called it a day there and then and went home.

Apex contributed a lot to Cowra. For me it brought a lifelong membership with a few members who I still meet regularly. But the club which brought me more happiness, excitement, adventure, satisfaction and friends, was the Cowra Aero Club.

Of all the activities I experienced there nothing was better than flying and aerobatics. Humans dreamt from the days of Icarus they could fly themselves. There's nothing better than the excitement you feel when



Cowra Aero club October 1955

you move the throttle forwards and the plane goes faster and that wonderful moment when you take off.

You're then above the world, as a human you have conquered space with the assistance of a motor, a propeller and two wings. Here in the air the airplane will react exactly to every movement of the stick in your right hand, the throttle in your left hand and your feet on the rudder pedals. You can do loops, fly upside down whilst you're hanging in the safety-harness, or roll through the air and make barrel rolls. If your stomach can take it, you're allowed to lose yourself in a spin when above 1,000 feet with the plane coming down in a spiral. This always made the spectators on the ground at an air show very scared because they thought you would crash.

The Cowra Aero Club was founded in 1950 by a few pilots in Cowra who served with the Royal Australian Air Force in England in World War II. The president was Group Captain Stinson DFC, ex-pilot of Short Sunderland seaplanes used by Coastal Command to protect convoys against German U-boats. Jeff Patterson, ex-Bomber Command, became secretary and George Jarratte, an ex-Dakota Transport pilot became treasurer.

Everywhere in Australia aero clubs were encouraged by the government. Pilots who had returned from war were encouraged to maintain

their flying currency. They only had to do a certain amount of flying hours per year. Young men and women were recruited to learn to fly. Lessons were financially supported by the government; state policy wanted to ensure a reserve in case of further war. This was at the time of the Cold War with Russia.

A number of young people became members of the Cowra Aero Club for different reasons. Some had career ambitions in aviation; others because they often travelled long distances by car and wished to fly instead. With your own plane it was quicker and safer. I simply wanted to fulfil a lifelong ambition.

The club started to give flying lessons on a big farm – Mulyan. The instructor was George Campbell, a very skilled pilot with many years experience. The owner of the farm made a large piece of land available, because we didn't have an airfield in Cowra. As a hangar for the Tiger Moth we used a shed and we made our own windsock which we attached to a pole. Petrol was stored in 44 gallon drums. This fuel was then pumped into the tank via a large funnel with a chamois cloth for a filter. We were always very careful to check for contamination by water in the petrol.

Our club had some remarkable members. Allan Mitchell was one of them. He was a very nice man; together with his father he had a farm where they grew wheat, Lucerne and sheep. Allan wanted to learn how to fly but he had one problem: he was only 1.60m tall and when he sat in the cockpit of the Tiger Moth, his head would disappear below the front window.

But nothing could stop him. He made a special cushion for the cockpit that allowed him to see out. But there was still another problem – he couldn't reach the rudder bars with his feet. An aircraft mechanic came to his aid and designed two extensions so Alan could control the plane. Alan got his wings and became an accomplished aerobatics pilot.

Clive Links, a taxi driver, was also a remarkable aspiring pilot. He wanted to build his own plane which is why he wanted to learn how to fly. He succeeded after many years of work in his spare time to put together a ¾ model of a Spitfire. Even though he had his wings for flying a Tiger Moth, Chipmunk, Pipers and Cessnas, flying a Spitfire is something completely different. Clive found out the hard way when he had an accident which he fortunately survived.

With so much interest in aviation in Cowra it didn't take long for the

municipality to buy land for an airstrip along the Grenfell Road. South Coast Airlines started a flying route to Sydney with Avro Ansons which were later replaced by Lockheed Lodestars. Instead of five hours by car you could now travel to Sydney in one hour.

The Cowra Aero Club got to be well known in the Central West of New South Wales. We visited air shows in other towns such as Orange, Parkes, Mudgee, Bathurst, Cootamundra and Narromine. At every air show we had flying competitions and two or three hours of air show for the visitors at the airfield. The highlight was usually aerobatics in a Chipmunk or Tiger Moth. Many times I got the chance to show people what you can do with such a plane. The ability of a pilot was tested with "dead stick" landings, streamer cutting and bombing a certain target.

For a dead stick landing you flew 1,000 feet above the airfield and then closed the throttle to glide back to the runway for a landing with no assistance from the engine. The purpose was to get to a stop as close as possible to a white cross on the runway. Streamer cutting was also something remarkable. As a serpentine (streamer) we used a roll of toilet paper. We would toss this out of the cockpit at a height of 3,000 feet and it would unroll all the way down. From the ground you could see a 100 metre-long vertical strip whirling down. The intention was to fly back and forth to cut a piece of the streamer with the wing. Whoever was able to do so the most times before the streamer hit the ground was the winner.

For the bombing competition you would get three paper bags with flour which you would toss out to a target somewhere on the airstrip. The winner was the one with the most bull's-eyes. None of these activities can be done any more; it has all been banned but in the 50's we all joined in and no one ever had an accident doing so. They were the "barnstorming" years. I'm glad I was able to participate myself.

Every now and again we used our planes to go hunting or fishing inland. Wild pigs were a big problem and we were always welcome to join the pig hunt. Every now and again we would go for a weekend to a big farm of a thousand or more hectares to go shooting. All those big farms had some kind of landing strip but you always had to be careful not to run into a sheep or kangaroo.

The Darling and Murray Rivers are well known for a special fish: the Murray Cod. But these rivers were a day's travel by car on sand and gravel roads from Cowra. We could get there by flying in four hours.

So we would fly on a Friday afternoon to Bourke in the far west of New South Wales. From there we could fly to our chosen destination early the next day and spend all Saturday and Sunday fishing and then take off for Cowra before sun-up to be on time at work on Monday.

I also used the Aero Club to go to conferences far away from Cowra. Two of those trips I'll never forget. The first was an Apex National Conference held in Ballarat in Victoria. I was then District Governor of Apex and the conference was to be officially opened by the Governor General, Lord Casey. He was also a pilot and had informed the Apex Board that he would arrive in his own plane.

The media also heard and all the reporters were waiting at the airport. When I landed with my Auster and two passengers and we alighted, much to our amazement, everyone started to clap. "Welcome to Ballarat, Sir" said one of the gentlemen and he gave me a large Havana cigar. (Lord Casey always smoked cigars). When I thanked him politely, he asked if I was Lord Casey. There was much laughter and the real Lord Casey arrived half an hour later.

Another trip was to a national Conference for Physical Education and health in Adelaide. I flew there with three colleagues in a Piper Cub. The flight was pleasant without adventure but at the conference, which took three days, we got special attention. The fact we had arrived in our own plane was a curiosity.

Just a few weeks before the conference a new film was released: "Those magnificent men in their flying machines". So the four of us were christened: "Those magnificent men in their flying machines", although our aircraft was much more modern. At each opportunity we were introduced that way and the four of us never forgot.

Sometimes I got unusual requests to fly for an hour. It was a well-known fact that children with a bad attack of whooping cough would improve considerably after flying for an hour at the height of 5,000 feet. It always gave me much satisfaction to lift off with the parents of a sick child to see how quickly he or she could breathe again.

Another special request was to scatter the ashes from an urn of someone who had been cremated. Farmers often had as their last wish to be scattered over the land where they had worked all their lives. I always found it a great honour to go with a family member to fly over the farm. I often did that at sundown when it was windless, a special experience.

The inhabitants of Cowra were very pleased with the Aero Club. They often went for "joy flights". It is very adventurous to sit in an open cockpit of a Tiger Moth with a leather helmet and goggles and four belts to keep you in your seat.

In 1952 due to many days of heavy rain, the complete Cowra district was heavily flooded. Many houses and streets were flooded and all the main roads were impassable. Farmers, especially those living close to the Lachlan River, became totally isolated, some for up to ten days. The Aero Club was quick to offer assistance. Every morning we would go on a "bread flight" during which we would throw fresh bread and the daily paper to the farms which were usually on a hill above the water. The farmers and their families were very grateful for that.

Yes, flying gave us much enjoyment and I still find it incredible to lift off in a small plane: a Cessna, a Piper or a Beechcraft. All worldly worries just disappear when you fly in the clouds and you are surrounded by distant horizons. I'm in awe when I fly over the land in Australia with so many beautiful landscapes and I feel privileged to live here.

Chapter 28

Translated by: Peter Reynders

At last: a family

Hilja and I enjoyed a good life in Cowra. Having permanent jobs as teachers we lived in our own home and owned a car. We had plenty to eat and eleven weeks of holidays per annum. What a difference to the misery during the war ten years ago! We were most thankful for these blessings. Yet we missed something. We remained childless. Both of us were eager to start a family but nothing happened. Worse, Hilja developed a hearing problem and progressively became deaf. We had to go to Sydney to see a specialist.

Dr Halliday diagnosed Hilja with otosclerosis - an abnormal growth of bone near the middle ear that blocks sound reaching the inner ear. The only treatment for this disease was an operation. Half a century ago this was big operation which took four and a half hours. After that the patient had to stay in hospital for with a further three months to regain strength. As a result of the operation the patient lost balance temporarily, this added to the sickness.

I took a few days special leave for the operation and during the following few weeks I travelled every weekend to Sydney to visit Hilja in hospital. Fortunately we had good friends in Sydney where Hilja could stay during the three months after the operation of the recovery period and after care. Mr and Mrs. Herbert, parents of one of the teachers of the Cowra Migrant Centre, took Hilja in as if she was their own daughter.

After her four months' stay in Sydney Hilja returned to Cowra. Everyone was happy to see her healthy at school. That was the first crisis in our married life. But we still did not have children. After being married for five years there was no hint of a baby. I wanted Hilja to visit a gynaecologist for a check but she did not want to hear of it. However after long insisting on my part she gave in and we went to Sydney to see Dr Grant.

He started with me. This was rather interesting; he had me look through a microscope and I saw my own sperm swim around. The investigation of Hilja took a lot longer and we had to return three times for more tests. Finally he discovered that her tubes were blocked as a result of peritonitis, a complication from an appendicitis operation she underwent before we were married.

Dr Grant was not very optimistic. He was prepared to operate but warned that there was only a small chance for success. He said: "Honestly, I do not recommend it. You have only a 20% chance to fall pregnant." This was long before microsurgery was known. This prognosis triggered a second crisis in our life. A future without children? Hilja wanted to give up but I tried to convince her that an operation was the only chance for a little baby. I told her at one stage: "The operation provides hope without the operation there is no hope and for the rest of your life you will blame yourself for not taking the 20% chance."

In the end, after weeks of talking, considering and thinking it over, Hilja decided to proceed with the operation. What a courageous decision! We again had to go to Sydney where Hilja went to the Crown Street Women's Hospital for the operation. According to the surgeon all went well and a couple of weeks later we were back in Cowra hoping that it had all been worth it.

And it was - as if miraculously, a few months later Hilja was pregnant. How thankful we were for the abilities of the Australian doctors. All went well, no complications. Hilja continued working normally as a teacher during the eight months before her maternity leave. Everyone showed an interest in the birth of our first child both at the Primary School where Hilja taught and at the High School where I worked. They all knew how we longed to have a family. Now it would happen. I will never forget 14 and 15 December 1958. Doctor Enid McLaren had told Hilja that the delivery could happen any day. It started at midnight. We had gone to bed at the normal time, read a few pages of a book, switched off the lights and went to sleep. However Hilja woke me up

at one o'clock and said: "I think the baby's coming." The suitcase was ready. I had to get dressed and we went in our car to the hospital. The nurses told me that I should go back home. Men were not welcome. "Please come back at eight in the morning for further news. We'll ring you if the baby is born before then."

At home I tried to go to sleep. It was strange to be in bed alone. We had been together for seven years. I was lying there just thinking. The years had passed without children. We were married because we wanted a family and now more than seven years later the day had finally arrived. I had at one stage given up hope of ever having a son or a daughter. I had been thinking that the radiation of the A-bomb in Nagasaki had made me sterile: so how excited I was when Hilja told me that she was pregnant!

Yes we would like to look after a little boy or girl. Yet, deep in my heart I feared the baby would not be normal. Many children born in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bodily misshapen or mentally disadvantaged. I had had contact with American army doctors who had studied the surviving victims of the atom bombs and they assured me that I should have no reason to worry. That was easy for them to say.

In the morning I returned to the hospital. The nurses assured me that all was fine, my wife was in the delivery room but it would still be a few hours before the baby would be born. I had the distinct feeling that I was not welcome; this was the domain of women, exclusively women. The Head Nurse suggested that it would be better if I just went to school to teach my various classes. The doctor would ring me if there was news.

Reluctantly I went to the high school so my colleagues did not have double work to look after my classes. The staff and the Director were all most pleasant, all wanted to know what had happened: "Are you a father now? What is the name of the baby? Are Hilja and the baby OK?" "The Director told me: "Within the hour you go to the hospital and I don't want to see you here this afternoon! I will take your classes myself."

An hour later I was back in the hospital. "Ah, you are back", said the nurse at the entrance of the maternity ward. "What a strange way to welcome a father to be", I thought. "She may have had bad experiences with other fathers." So there I was in the waiting room. Friendly nurses let me know that all was well with Hilja. "It will not be long now."

Fifteen hours later, I wondered how Hilja felt. Was there a problem? Why did it take so long? "You do not need to worry, Mr Couvret" said a friendly nurse. The first baby often takes a while if the mother is older than thirty." That was comforting. Sixteen hours later - no news yet. Seventeen hours later - still waiting.

After eighteen endless hours Doctor McLaren emerged:

"Congratulation Mr Couvret, you have a healthy little boy. " I was delighted. I could have embraced the doctor. I was beside myself with joy: a boy, a son and he was normal and healthy. God had been so good to me; my ultimate wish had been granted. The nurses also came out and congratulated me. Even the surly nurse at the entrance smiled.



Paul Senior with his firstborn son Paul Jr.

A few minutes later I was allowed to visit Hilja. She was really exhausted but her face beamed. "It's a little boy", she whispered in my ear. "Just go and have a look at him." One of the nurses took me to the nursery. There I stood in front of a glass window, while another nurse wheeled a cradle to the other side of the window pane. It was the greatest, most

wonderful moment of my life! There he was: my own son, he was so beautiful with his light blond hair. He opened his blue little eyes and he looked at me and his little soul seemed to say: "I am glad that I got you as my daddy." An incredible feeling of tremendous joy came over me. It lasted many days, almost the whole week. I now understood what they mean when they say: "He is over the moon."

It was custom in Cowra that a new father throws a little party to celebrate the birth of his first son with his friends. We lived at the outskirts of the town without neighbours close by, so I decided to have a party with a barbecue and a keg of beer. I invited all the men of the school and my mates of the Apex club, Aero Cub and sport clubs. It was to start at six in the evening and all was ready an hour before time, two barbecues, all bread spread with butter, salad dishes ready and the beer was ice cold.

But at six there was nobody. I found this strange and became a bit worried. What had happened? But half an hour later I heard some awful noise around the corner of the street and Dentist Rupert Edwards in a Scottish outfit with his bagpipes followed by fifty friends marched in rows four abreast into the garden. And what a feast it was, with singing, wild stories and jokes. The keg of beer was emptied and there was so much noise that the chooks did not produce any eggs for a week.

The day before Christmas the Doctor advised: "You can now take the baby home". I was allowed to carry Paul Peter myself when Hilja and I left the hospital and to the car packed close by. It was the first time I had my son in my arms. I got tears in my eyes. I can remember how I drove ever so carefully to our home in West Cowra. I avoided all the potholes in the pavement and went extra slow in the bends. We had a precious passenger on board.

Christmas 1958 was very special for us. We celebrated the birth of our own Christmas Baby. Hilja's parents were also very happy with their first grandchild. We felt so happy.

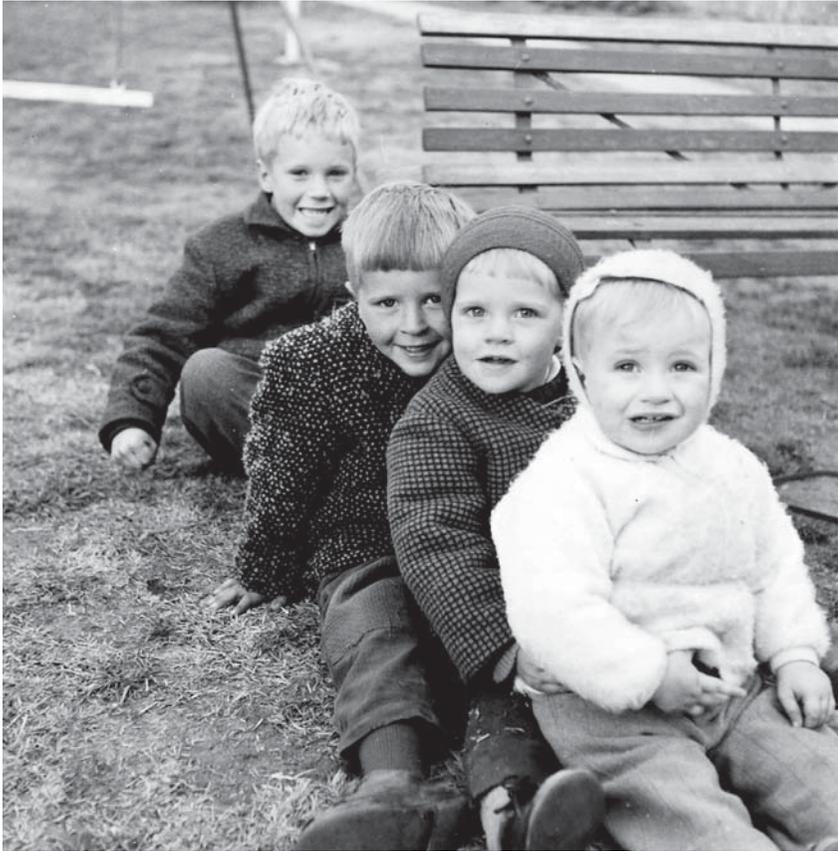
It was summer and very hot and not easy to keep the baby cool. There was no air-conditioning, just an electric fan. Boxing Day was a real ordeal. The temperature climbed to over 40 degrees Celsius during the day and the district was ravaged by a sandstorm lasting all afternoon. Visibility was reduced to 30 metres. The heavy wind caused a black out, so no power and no fan. Hilja and I sat in turns near the baby with a hand fan and wet cloths to keep the baby cool.

That was the start of Paul junior's life full of exciting adventures. For us it meant a new responsibility; we had to look after a little son. We accepted it eagerly. As a toddler little Paul had the advantage of living also with his grandparents who really spoiled him.

To our great surprise Hilja was pregnant again in July 1960 and on 20 March 1961 Thomas Andrew was born. For the second time yet again that terrific feeling for me as a father about a new life. The nurses of the Cowra hospital nicknamed Tom the little "Golliwog". He was born with a head of black hair that stood up like a brush. A few months later it disappeared and he grew blond curls, just like his elder brother.

Yet we still hoped for a daughter. But on 1 October 1962 Michael Anthony was born. Again a healthy little boy. We were not disappointed, as long as the baby was healthy. Great, three boys! But the Good Lord had more plans for our family. On 12 November the following year a fourth son was born: Christopher Mark!

We were the proud parents of four sons. What happiness and responsibility to raise them.
It changed our lives but we have done our best and four properly raised men, now having their own families, are witness of this.



4 sons - Paul 7, Tom 5, Mike 3, Chris 2

Chapter 29

Translated by: Henny Spee

My career in education

Forty years ago the promotion system for Higher Education teachers in the Department of Education in NSW was based on ability, education and seniority in grade. Teachers with university grades were always preferred over colleagues who came from training colleges. This was of great annoyance to the directors, because teachers with a university grade knew a lot about their subjects but were often hopelessly ignorant in teaching pupils - some just could not teach.

For promotion your name had to appear on a list. There were four lists. If you were on the first one, this meant that you were good enough for advancement. This was the longest list. The second one was for head teachers in all subjects. The third one was for Vice Principal and the fourth, the most coveted, was for Principal.

Everybody on those lists was given a number. Once every two years a group of inspectors came to every High School for a week to judge the standard of the work at the school and the promotion of certain teachers to a higher list.

At the end of the school year every High School was given a list with all the vacancies for the following year. Everyone on a certain list then had the opportunity to put in an application. If there was more

than one candidate for a certain position the teacher with the lowest number would be appointed. This way every year you advanced higher on the list because some teachers before you on the list had advanced. A problem for teachers outside Sydney was that promotion usually always meant had to go to another school. Most country towns had only one High School and you had to wait many years for promotion at the same school. As a result, if you wanted to advance you had to move.

Towards the end of 1964 I decided to take that big step. I had already been teaching at the High School in Cowra and there was no chance for promotion so I applied and had the choice between Broken Hill, Wagga Wagga or Lithgow. I chose the last one because it was only two hours by car from Sydney. My wife Hilja had to visit the specialist on a regular basis for aftercare following her ear operation. Besides it was not too far from Cowra where our house was and where the grandparents of our children were living. We rented out our house to a doctor. Our plan was to come back once I had become head master or deputy principal.

In January 1965 we moved with our four boys to Lithgow. It was quite different to prosperous Cowra. From a city with a lot of fresh air to a smoky grey city with coal mines and a big weapons factory. Since the end of the war there was less demand for coal and the factory got fewer orders for weaponry. There was a lot of unemployment and the city looked miserable. But the people were very friendly and the High School was held in high regard. Parents encouraged their children to study hard and get high marks, so they would not have to work in the mines.

Never ever in all my time in education had I met parents so determined as the people in Lithgow. The mining union was also quite liberal with financial help for the school. As a senior master I had to oversee various subjects which had only one or two teachers: sports, arts and drawing, music, Latin and Bahasa Indonesia. They were a very diverse group of teachers but they were all very enthusiastic. Our sports teams were to become champions, gifted students had a chance to become famous artists, a school choir was formed and the Latin teacher convinced everybody that all wisdom came from Latin. It was pleasant to work with these people. For me it was also something new - for the first time in my life I was a boss. I learned quite soon that you got a lot further if you asked people to do something rather than order them left, right and centre.

My sons Paul and Tom went to Primary school, Michael and Chris were still too young and played at home. Lithgow was situated in the Blue Mountains and in winter it could get very cold there. Every year it snowed and while we were there in 1965 the city was struck by a snowstorm which caused quite a lot of damage. We had one metre of snow, all the roads to and from Lithgow were closed because of ice and snow and electricity and phone cables cracked from the weight of frozen snow, causing a blackout.

The blackout lasted five days but luckily we had a coal stove for heating and a camping primus with two burners for cooking and to heat milk for the children. For lighting we used candles, torches and a small kerosene lamp. A battery-powered radio kept us informed about the situation. The schools were closed for three days because the roads were impassable. Everybody had to do their shopping on foot and candles, batteries, kerosene and gas cylinders were sold out in one day. Many roofs were damaged by the weight of the snow and most houses lost gutters torn down by the mass of snow.

The children loved it. They had never seen snow in their lives and made a snowman with pieces of coal for eyes, a carrot for a nose, an orange peel as a mouth full of teeth and a head with a black carton on top. In the garden they tried to ride on their tricycles, one steering and the other pushing. In the park they slid down the hill in a plastic baby bath. They loved it but mother Hilja was not too pleased as later on she had to dry all the wet socks and shoes in front of the heater.

Summertime also had special attractions for the children. All along the roads around Lithgow blackberries grew in abundance and on Sundays we went with little pails and large containers to pick them. A pretty sight, four little boys with purple hands and purple lips - for of course they always had to taste the berries. At home Hilja made jam out of them.

We had counted on living in Lithgow for at least three years but to my great surprise I got an offer from the director of Sydney Teachers' College to become a relief teacher in place of somebody who wanted to obtain his doctorate in the United States. That meant a future in Sydney where many positions in education were possible. It was also an opportunity to establish ourselves in Sydney indefinitely. Hilja and I decided to sell our house in Cowra in exchange for a new home somewhere in Sydney, not too far from the university. But that was easier said than done. To my consternation I found out that houses in the better suburbs of Sydney cost three times as much as in Cowra.

February, March and April 1966 were a difficult time. Whilst living in Lithgow I was already working at Sydney Teachers' College. From Monday to Thursday I was staying in Sydney and Friday till Sunday I was back in Lithgow with my family. Monday morning at six o'clock I was already on the road for a 2½ hour drive to the university to be there on time to teach from nine o'clock. Every afternoon I spent time making contact with real estate agents in different localities to look at houses. It took four months before we finally found a nice, brand-new bungalow in a new area: Belrose. Thanks to a housing loan we could pay that off in twenty years so we moved in May 1966 to our new address: 2 Hindson Place, where we have lived for the past forty years.

The house had a large garden and the primary school, Wakehurst Public was just behind our house. That was a terrific advantage. All four boys went to school there for six years and played every afternoon with their friends. There was a football oval, cricket nets, a tennis area, basketball rings and concrete paths to cycle on. And if the wind was favourable they could fly their kites. There was always something to do.

Work at the Teachers' College was quite a challenge. It required extreme endeavour and extensive preparation and study for each class. There was a great difference between adult students and High School pupils. They were very intelligent young people who wanted to become teachers of physical education. They were also fantastic athletes in certain sports such as rugby, cricket, athletics, swimming and water polo and some of them represented NSW or even Australia.

Some of my students were very successful in later life. One became a professor and Chancellor of Wollongong University, another became managing director of one of the greatest sport clubs in Sydney, the Canterbury Leagues Club and the director of operations of the Olympic Stadium in 2000 was also an ex-student.

After working for two years as teacher at the Sydney Teachers' College, the man whose place I had filled came back after receiving his degree. I had to go elsewhere and had the choice to continue in tertiary education but that meant that we again had to move house. I was offered Wagga Wagga Teachers' college but that did not appeal to us. Hilja and the children were so happy in our new home where I had just established a lovely garden with lawns.

I did not think it was fair to my family to move house for the third time in three years and decided to go back as a senior master at a High

School. I was lucky to get appointed at Balgowlah Boys High School, a distance of ten minutes by car from our home. It was the perfect solution to our dilemma.

This transfer was for me again a different experience. A school had 400 boys and no girls. Half the staff was female and some of the ladies had trouble keeping discipline with rowdy boys. The Principal made me responsible for school discipline. I had always taught in mixed classes previously and I found that the presence of girls in a class kept the behaviour of naughty boys in check. They did not want to be laughed at by the girls. But in Balgowlah that was out of the question and some rascals did the craziest things without thinking of the safety of other pupils. Setting a garbage bin on fire, fighting in the school grounds and smoking in the toilets all happened on a regular basis.

Luckily I was able to get the mischievousness under control. That was the downside of Balgowlah High. The positive side of the school was that the pupils were very good at sport. The school won championships rugby, hockey and tennis and was number one in the State in water polo and trampoline jumping. The school was also renowned for the excellent yearly theatrical performances. These were great productions – thanks to the full cooperation of the English Department, the wood and metal work people who made everything for the stage, the art teacher and his pupils who painted the sets and the music teacher who directed the young musicians and singers. Another group of boys took care of the lighting.

For several years Balgowlah won the prize for the best performance. One of the boys who worked behind the scenes is still doing that but now he the manager of the famous Sydney Opera House. At reunions of old students for which I always receive an invitation, we are still talking about these events. They were always the highlight of the school year.

Because the school was only half a kilometre from Sydney Harbour, I organised kayaking as a school sport. I had 12 canoes to my disposal and everybody was allowed to take part on the condition that he first got the bronze medal for lifesaving. Every Wednesday afternoon during summer we paddled in the bays and tributaries of Sydney Harbour. It was very interesting and the best way to see the harbour. I also organised weekends to the Snowy Mountains to ski for two days. That was quite expensive but many parents liked their sons to have the chance to learn how to ski. These were always very pleasant excursions.

On one of the biennial inspections of the school I became a candidate for the third list of deputy principals. Usually a first time candidate was rejected but then on the second inspection you succeeded. The inspection was the most thorough one I ever experienced. No less than seven inspectors wanted to know everything about me, they asked me my opinion about aspects of education and how I would solve problems.

The fifth day finished with a debate where all seven were present and asked me difficult questions which I answered as well as I could. To my great surprise and happiness I had to go to the office of the Principal at the end of the day, where the Head Inspector congratulated me with my success. That afternoon I gave a party for the whole staff to thank them for their help and cooperation. And now I had to wait for a vacancy somewhere in Sydney in the next few years.

Chapter 30

Translated by: Peter Reynders

The NSW Correspondence School

Towards the end of 1973 I received a telegram from the Director General of the Education Department, notifying me that I had been appointed Deputy Principal of the New South Wales (NSW) Correspondence School. It was a special school with about 5,000 students, a staff of 480, including 400 secondary school teachers, 60 primary school teachers and 20 administrative staff.

The school was housed in a large office building of eight stories and an apartment for the concierge with a great view of Sydney. A printing office was also located on one of the lower floors. Originally, the school was established because many children in the far west of NSW could not attend school. They lived on remote stations far from any town, their parents being sheep or cattle graziers. It was possible to send the boys and girls to boarding schools but these were hundreds of kilometres from home and the cost was very high.

Most parents preferred to raise their children themselves within the family. The father would work on the station of thousands of hectares and mother would try to teach the children to read, spell, write, do some arithmetic, et cetera. However that was not easy. Mothers were rarely educated to teach and the resulting level of education was generally rather low.

Mr Kellerman, a professional teacher, was one of thousands of Australians in France with the Imperial Forces during World War I to fight the Germans. In the trenches of the western front he met many soldiers from the west of NSW. They were strong, courageous and resourceful men. They were able to solve many problems but they had great difficulty in reading and writing letters. Private Kellerman assisted his comrades-in-arms. They dictated to him what to write to their families and he wrote it down diligently for dispatch to Australia. He also assisted with reading out letters from home. It was then that Kellerman decided that if he should survive the war he would start a correspondence school.

He got wounded, lost a leg but after the war back in Sydney he convinced the Education Department of the need to establish a correspondence school for children from the outback.

That is how the NSW Correspondence School started. It was first housed in part of a monastery of the Black Friars in Sydney. The school carried the nickname of "Black Friars". It was much valued by parents of hundreds of children who now had a chance for the first time to gain a primary school education.

The lessons for each subject were dispatched by mail each week to the remote homesteads, some more than 1,000 km from Sydney. The lessons were printed on sheets complete with many illustrations and examples, to assist not only the children but also the supervising mothers. The pupils were expected to return the exercises of their homework. Corrections and comment about the work were sent back the week after.

Every child had the same teacher for a year. The parents were encouraged to provide the school with as much information about the child as possible by mail or telephone and to send a photograph of the child. Older children sent their own correspondence. That way the teacher developed a profile of his pupils and a solid relationship could develop between pupil and teacher.

The staff were also very special. They were predominantly teachers with many years of experience who could not teach face to face because of some health problem such as loss of voice, deafness or walking difficulties.

Being medically retired after twenty years of service was, for career teachers, a personal disaster. They were grateful for a second chance in their career when they were appointed at the correspondence school, where they taught the children of the NSW far west with great

dedication. The whole system was dependent on Australia Post. The mailman who delivered and collected letters often only once a week was indispensable. Occasionally it happened that the postman could not come because of inaccessibility of the road because of heavy rain and floods but in spite of such difficulties the school had good results.

Children who were to attend High School at the nearest boarding school were educated as well as those from a regular school. However this did not help parents of children who had attended the correspondence school at primary school level but who lived too far from a secondary school and they could not afford a boarding school. They requested the Education Department also establish a High School course by correspondence. Sheep and cattle grazing in NSW were important for the economy and the supporters of the idea had enough influence to convince the Government to also begin a secondary school by correspondence.

It began with the first form of High School and lasted five years* after which it was possible to sit for the final examination. The establishment of the school had great advantages for the pupils who had followed the primary school correspondence school and was also very useful for children from small villages and country towns who had attended a local primary school but could not access a high school. They could enrol too.

The establishment of a secondary school by correspondence meant a large expansion. A number of teachers were appointed for every subject, with a head teacher. Every teacher had several students who lived in different localities in NSW. Selected teachers documented the lessons ready for the printer. This was special work and these writers had the ability to commit good lessons to paper. Other teachers sent the lessons to the students together with homework tasks that had to be returned.

The Black Friars monastery site was now too small and the school moved to William Street, Sydney, where I started in February 1974 as Deputy Principal with Alan Cole as Principal.

The correspondence school developed greatly. Originally the school was only meant for isolated students of the outback; however Australian children who lived abroad could also enrol. Their fathers could work with the Diplomatic Corps, on an oil refinery or an irrigation dam project, or be a Military Attaché. These children could simply continue their studies for two years without interruption.

There were also students who after an accident or rigorous operation on, say, their spine or hips had to remain in hospital for six months or a year. Their stay in the hospital was less boring because they could simply continue their studies. But most of the high school students were part-time and followed just one or two subjects by correspondence. They were students of smaller secondary schools with a limited range of subjects. This was often the case with languages such as classical Greek, Latin, French, German, Indonesian, Spanish, Russian, Japanese and Mandarin. This resulted in a shortage of teachers in some subjects.

* From the late sixties high school took six years.

Chemistry, biology and zoology students could also enrol with the school. Teaching chemistry and languages was a challenge. To learn a language the student had to listen to 45 rpm gramophone records which were sent in special wooden boxes with new needles. After the return of the record another one was sent. This way student had the chance to learn a foreign language. When I was appointed Deputy Principal, Philips and Sony were both making very popular cassette recorders with 60-minute cassettes. These were ideal for language teachers. But first I had to convince the Principal, the Inspectors and Head Office that the new invention was worth it.

I succeeded and the school received a budget to switch from records to modern cassettes, including the purchase of a number of recorders. The cassettes were much cheaper than records and easier to mail over. The students received a recorder on loan and they could now also speak with the teacher on a blank tape. The production of lessons on cassette was also easier, the teachers did not travel to a recording studio but our own sound proof studio was used. Ultimately I also obtained permission to purchase equipment to copy lesson cassettes.

The introduction of the cassette recorders was a most successful innovation. As well as all the other advantages it improved the interaction between teacher and pupil. Soon teachers in other subjects started to use cassettes for all aspects of teaching. For example, if a student did not understand a printed lesson, a teacher could explain the lesson on a cassette; it was faster than writing it down.

Lessons by correspondence were really unique. Learning subjects like geography or history was relatively simple but how to learn chemistry? It is a subject where school students often do laboratory work.

Correspondence students would do this in the kitchen, the bathroom or the shed. At the beginning of the year the student was sent a wooden box with test tubes, packets of chemicals, scales, a burner, glass tumblers, a small microscope and magnifying glass, spatulas, different scalpels and even a dried rat for dissecting. The rat had to be soaked in water for 24 hours, so it would swell before the student could dissect it. It was all very ingenious.

The administration of the school was complex and confusing. There were all sorts of lists, forms, applications, requests, order forms, enrolment documents and reports - all having a number.

Over the years as the school expanded, oversight reduced and a messy system developed. Every section used its own form for the same purpose with its own numbering. It happened that different forms had the same number in the school. This caused confusion and misleading information.

Soon after I started as Deputy Principal I became aware of the many difficulties caused by this chaotic system of forms. I got the job to normalise the hundreds of forms, after liaising with the Principal. It was a colossal enterprise for which I needed the cooperation of the head teachers. Gradually I succeeded in setting up a simplified system which was in the end advantageous for the teachers and the administration but more importantly, the parents and the pupils.

The final examination for high school is a state examination in NSW. All students sat for the same exam in each subject which took three hours. Towards the end of the year each school received a roster so all candidates would know when to sit for each exam. Each subject is examined on exactly the same date and time for all schools in NSW, so nobody could provide information on the exam. The exam papers were sent to examination places in sealed envelopes. For safe keeping they were then locked in a bank or at the police station. The Principal collected the papers from their secure place on the day of examination.

To organise the final high school examination was very difficult for the correspondence school. That was one of my tasks. The time differences were a great problem. Candidates were spread over the world: Paris, London, Eindhoven, Norway, Washington, Los Angeles, Alaska, Hawaii, India, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Morocco and Zanzibar, South Africa... From Sydney I had to find a reliable person who could supervise a student for three hours, in suitable quarters. We often used schools in foreign countries. Priests, policemen and Ministers

of religion were reliable supervisors. On military bases it was often the commander who was made responsible. The whole organisation took about three months with numerous letters and here and there a telephone discussion.

In spite of the preparations some things could still go wrong. I can remember how a disgruntled officer at an air base in Alaska rang because the exam paper had not arrived. The fault was traced to someone at an airfield in Honolulu. To make up for it they sent a US Air Force C-130 Hercules to Alaska with the lost examination papers.

Showing visitors around the correspondence school was for me one of the most pleasant tasks. Our good name was known in education circles. Inspectors and Principals, often from other states, came to see for themselves how we managed all this. Lecturers and Professors of universities were also interested. NSW was the avant garde in distance education in Australia.

I was invited by the Government of the Northern Territory to come and provide advice for a week on how they could improve their school. It was for me a pleasant experience and the school in Darwin was grateful. We often had visitors from other countries and I was convinced that our system was the best in the world together with the Canadian one.

It became so busy with visitors that on average I used one day a week for guided tours and explanations. Indonesia and Thailand would send a delegation of teachers to Sydney in the company of their Minister of Education, to see for themselves how our correspondence school was managed. I had to design a roster to ensure that all members of the delegations could personally experience how all the sections operated. They spoke good English and wanted to learn as much as possible. At the end of the tour I was sometimes surprised with a nice present: a silver sado from Indonesia or a golden tie clip from Thailand.

New inventions were rapidly adopted in the correspondence school. Plastics and fibreglass, for example, were incorporated into the industrial arts course as soon as they became popular. Another development was the video camera. I saw great possibilities for video in several subjects. Fortunately, some teachers used their own cameras to make videos with surprisingly good results. This convinced the Government to fund the establishment of a video section and led to a further improvement in teaching at the school.

My time as Deputy Principal at this school was one of the most interesting periods of my career. I brought many improvements to the organisation and administration of the school. I had the chance to introduce new technologies. I assisted dozens of teachers in solving their problems. But the greatest satisfaction from my work was the many letters from thankful parents and students who received their education at the school. They appreciated the chance to continue their studies even though they lived far from the school or abroad.

In August 1982 I retired, the Principal and a few of my colleagues organised a splendid farewell dinner with 200 guests in a hall at Sydney University. My wife Hilja and my four sons had also been invited. It was a very jolly party with much wine and beer and warm, funny speeches. I received a set of golf clubs as a farewell present complete with bag and buggy and Hilja received a set of beautiful porcelain Spanish art pieces.

That was how my life as a teacher, mentor and Deputy Principal ended. I will always thank God that I had the chance to contribute so much to the education and a happy life of so many.

Chapter 31

Translated by: Marleen Honig

My Experiences as a Councillor ¹

When my wife and I moved from Lithgow to Belrose in May 1966, we didn't know many people in our new neighbourhood. But soon we made many new friends through membership of the "Forest Kirk", the Wakehurst School Parents and Citizens (P&C) Club, Rotary and the Forestville Returned Services League (RSL) club. These kinds of clubs always need people willing to serve on their boards. As a newcomer and volunteer it didn't take long before I joined various committees.

Due to my background, I was a popular choice for Chairman of the Forestville RSL Youth Club. The war veterans supported our club which had 800 members. The kids were able to do gymnastics, swimming, tennis and art classes (with the help of parents). The Youth Club was highly appreciated in the community and I became well known. Then, something happened that changed my life.

It happened like this. Belrose is a suburb in the Warringah Council area. Sydney is divided into over 41 councils. In 1973 Warringah was the largest, with 185,000 citizens. Twelve councillors ran it with one as

¹ Editor's note: Councillors or Aldermen are the elected members of council – counsellors give comfort and advice – i.e. counsel.

mayor, or “Shire President” as he was then known.

In Australia, councillors are chosen by citizens 18 years or over living in a defined council area. The councillors elect a mayor every year. General elections are held every three years for all 176 councils in New South Wales. When a councillor resigns, special elections or a “by-election” are held to choose a new councillor.

Late 1972, there was a vacancy in the Warringah Council and a number of volunteers nominated to fill it. In those days councillors weren't paid. It was an honorary position which gave ordinary citizens the opportunity to become a councillor and influence decisions on how the council would spend ratepayers' money for the next three years.

Various people asked me to stand for council and when an editor of the local newspaper, “The Manly Daily” promised his support I decided to take to up the challenge. I got advice from experienced councillors on what to do for the election. It looked like I would need all the advice I could get. There were nine other candidates: one was a millionaire, two others were members of political parties and I had last position on the ballot paper.

The next step was the negotiations with the other candidates for preferences. Australia uses a system of preferential voting in which voters must indicate their preference for the listed candidates in numerical order with their first choice indicated by a number one and subsequent choices by numbers 2, 3, 4 etc next to the respective candidate names. With multiple candidates, outright wins are rare and the outcome of an election most often depends on preferences.

This happened to me. When the seven candidates with the least votes were progressively eliminated, only three remained; the millionaire had the most votes, then me, then the representative of the Labor Party. Luckily, most of the preferential votes were for me and I won.

And that is how my career as a politician started. It opened a new world for me. Now I was one of 12 councillors of Warringah Shire, responsible for the spending of \$60 million per year. At least three quarters of that money went to salaries of staff, maintenance of streets and footpaths, water drainage, maintenance of Council buildings, recreational areas and parks and regular garbage collection.

That expenditure was essentially non-discretionary in that it had to be

spent to pay for the routine council work. But each year, there was a few million dollars of discretionary money, not committed, that could be used for new buildings, community work, better streets, recreation and the like.

Every councillor had a 'wish list' with things he or she wanted for their neighbourhoods. When combined, these lists added up to more than \$100 million but there was not that kind of money – not by a long shot. This made the council meetings very interesting as each councillor tried to promote his or her own pet project.

As a result it took hours of personal negotiating to get a proposal onto the agenda. Often reciprocal cooperation was needed as support for one project was traded for support for another. Support of six colleagues gave you the majority made you successful and often meant you would be mentioned in the newspaper along with a picture. My first successful proposal was the build of four tennis courts in Belrose with a total cost of \$60,000.

Most councillors worked during the day so the meetings were held in the evening. They often lasted till well after midnight due to endless debates. Some dealt with important matters but unfortunately a good deal of time was often wasted on piddling matters.

The Council met once a month and was advised by various committees. The most important included Town Planning, Health and Building, Parks and Recreation and the Finance Committee. Every proposal had to be approved by the council before becoming legislation. That is why the meetings often took very long; every councillor had five minutes of time allocated to speak on each proposal.

Life of a councillor was very busy. At least once a week there were meetings at the town hall and there were countless invitations to attend meetings of clubs. Every weekend you were guest of honour at sporting matches, concerts or a formal ball. Lots of time was spent on people who called or wrote letters about certain problems regarding another councillor or a neighbour.

The most common complaints concerned barking dogs, dangerously large trees growing too close to residences, noisy neighbours and the like. On average I received twenty letters a week and thankfully every councillor had a secretary who typed out dictated letters on formal paper. I always tried to respond to every letter and that was very much appreciated by the citizens.

Being a councillor took up almost all of my spare time. I was often away from home during the evenings and luckily my wife Hilja helped out at home with our four boys. She often joined me on official engagements and I tried to take the boys along to events on the weekends. They enjoyed it a lot and it gave them a broader perspective.

Working as a councillor gave me a lot of satisfaction. I was able to help many fellow citizens and there were many opportunities for charity work that benefited the entire community. Most importantly there was always money for good initiatives, often hundreds of thousands of dollars. The most expensive project during my time as councillor was the Warringah Aquatic Centre – and Olympic pool complex with a diving tower and springboard that cost \$1.2 million.

While most people were polite to councillors, there were some who wrote insulting and very critical letters accusing us of being corrupt idlers or worse. There was nothing in the accusations as we were all honest. Not all our predecessors however had been squeaky clean. In 1965 three councillors had accepted bribes and were sentenced to terms of imprisonment. I always had to be cautious and was careful to retain my good name.

Overall, citizens trusted me and throughout the years I maintained a good reputation. Various clubs appointed me their patron which was an honour to me. Every three years there were general elections in every council in the state of New South Wales. These were exciting times because there were always candidates who thought they could do a better job.

Usually there were around 40 to 60 hopefuls supported by groups of citizens who thought they might have a chance during the election. Nevertheless I survived these challenges. Apparently, people were happy with me as their representative. I got re-elected during the next six elections.

Each year in September the twelve councillors set around the table to decide who would be the next mayor.

Epilogue

By: Paul Couvret Junior

As I was reading this I realised I had reached the end and thought "Where's the next chapter? There's still another 35 years to go!" I assume he wrote more but we weren't able to find it.

But perhaps it's not a bad place to leave the story.

We're up to 1979 when he was elected mayor, or "Shire President" as he was then known.

The remainder of his life was one of peace, prosperity, success, an increasing public profile and the happiness of the family which he and my mother created.

For my brothers and I though, he was of course our dad. As a teacher, he was always on holidays when we were and he took us on lots of adventures. We never spent our holidays at a resort or stayed in a hotel. That was the last thing he would have wanted to do. Most often we would go way out west, "back of Bourke", to the Paroo River Channel country, where we would go camping and shooting. Every night we would sit around the campfire, watch for satellites and falling stars and he would play old Dutch folk songs on his harmonica. He always watched the stars and closely followed the space program, first to the moon and then beyond.



Campfire with sons September 68 Oxley

My three brothers Tom, Michael, Chris and I grew up, left home, got married, had children of our own – ten grandchildren for mum and dad – basically a normal, safe, prosperous life free of the war, hardship and tragedy that so characterised the first part of our dad's life. Indeed, for the most part we were largely unaware of it. Of course we knew about his experiences of the war, prison camp, the atomic bomb - he had told us some of these stories and we'd been to

his talks here and there but never in the detail that has been revealed in these memoirs which we are now all seeing for the first time.



Hunting with his teenagers

When dad first became Shire President it coincided nicely with his retirement as a teacher. So in effect he simply replaced one full-time job with another. And from that point on he really never stopped. In addition to the Warringah Aquatic Centre, he achieved many other successes for the people of Warringah including the Glen Street Theatre – now a regular fixture in Sydney’s performing arts scene - and he was instrumental in establishing the Oxford Falls Peace Park which remains a focal point for Warringah’s ongoing association with Japan, which he himself initiated.

Perhaps the best anecdote for the purposes of the epilogue to this memoir was an encounter he had in 1993, when he finally returned to Nagasaki to attend a conference of Mayors for Peace.

Dad told me the story himself and he also recounted it to Michael Caulfield for the Australians at War Film Archive where it is recorded in his book “Voices of War”¹

¹ Voices of War, Michael Caulfield, Department of Veterans Affairs, Hodder Australia, 2006, ISBN 0 7336 2050 7



Paul, Hilja, Paul jr, Tom, Michael and Chris



Paul and his grandchildren

He was introduced to a woman who had been working in the shipyard as a fourteen year-old schoolgirl.

As dad told the story, she said to him:

“Ever since I was there I have been feeling so guilty about what my people did to your people, the way you were treated, the cruelty, the rags you walked around in and I felt so sorry for you and I never had a chance to apologise but today is the day.’
And then she stood in front of me and she bowed deeply and [said] the only English word she knows, ‘Sorry, sorry, sorry.’
She then brought out a little plate with two peaches, two pieces of apple, two cherries. She explained she had always wanted to share her food with the prisoners but had never dared, as they would have been severely punished by the guards. ‘But today my chance has come to share this, so let’s eat this together.’
So here we stood and I didn’t know this woman from a bar of soap but I put my arms around her and we both stood there crying and I think any hatred, residue of hatred in my heart against the Japanese just melted.”

And thus, after all those years, was he fully reconciled with his past.

He was Shire President for four years until 1983 and thereafter remained on Council until he retired – again - in 1995. In addition, he served on the executive of the Local Government Association of NSW for eight years and continued his community service by remaining active and involved in Rotary, Apex, the RSL, the bushfire brigades, as patron of various sporting associations and as a guest speaker in all sorts of places, particularly schools, where he spoke about his war experiences. He was out of the house pretty much seven evenings a week giving back to the community all he could, one way or another. He also became increasingly involved with the Dutch community, in particular Dutch war veterans and became President of the Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women’s Association (NESWA). He led the Dutch contingent in the ANZAC Day march each year and was very busy behind the scenes to improve the recognition of Dutch veterans in Australia. He often drove to Canberra for one thing or another at the Embassy, including on one occasion, a meeting with both the Dutch and Australian Prime Ministers.

In 1998 he was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) “for

service to local government through the Warringah Shire Council, to veterans and to the community.” In 2010 he was made a Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau by the Queen of the Netherlands.

And right up to the end he never slowed down his community activism and his schedule of speaking about the war and his own experiences of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Of course his last year was not his best but I recall one conversation when he was quite lucid and said he had always thought his prison camp experiences would take thirty years off his life. “But”, he said, “Here I am, ninety years old! Who would have thought?”

Who indeed? It was quite a life. And a life well lived.