

SM man saw Nagasaki bombing

By ERNIE BASENER
Staff Writer

SAN MARCOS — Chuck Dreasher is one of the few Americans to witness an atomic bomb used in warfare.

Dreasher was a prisoner of war near Nagasaki when the U.S. bombed the city, and witnessed the blast.

Forty years ago today Dreasher was working at the top of a hill weeding the area above the main activity of the POW camp — a coal mine beneath the hill where most of the prisoners worked.

Dreasher escaped duty in the mine because he was simply too tall to work in the low underground passageways. The civilian guard

assigned to watch him as he performed his duties at the camp near Fukuoka on the southern island of Kyushu seemed to be nervous and a bit distracted.

Dreasher saw a flight of American planes including the B-29 dubbed "Bock's Car" making its way to Nagasaki some 75 miles to the southeast.

Sitting in the bomb bay of Bock's Car was a weapon Dreasher had not been told about. Three days earlier "Little Boy" vaporized Hiroshima, leveling the city and killing as many as 140,000. The Japanese guards had heard of the nuclear detonation but did not tell the prisoners about the blast.

Dreasher, who now resides in San Marcos, was a career Marine. He enlisted in January 1940, nearly two years before the U.S. entered the war and retired in 1961. He remembers the atomic bombing of Nagasaki well — it was an event that dramatically improved his life.

In a single moment of blinding light, much of the port city of Nagasaki was leveled and as many as 70,000 persons lost their lives.

"It was one of the most beautiful things I'd ever seen," Dreasher said recalling the emotional firestorm the bomb set off within him. "I didn't think about food or the end of the war or anything. It was the most beautiful

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mushroom I ever saw."

Dreasher, a Marine sergeant working in the motor pool, had been captured on Corregidor in June of 1942. After more than three years of hard work on short rations, the bombing changed his life and those of his fellow POWs.

Food for the prisoners in the best of times consisted of rice and sweet potato vine soup — in the worst of times it was fish bones, Dreasher said. Rarely, Dreasher said, he got the opportunity to upgrade his diet by catching snakes. Dreasher, a native of Brawley, had grown up with snakes and had no fear of them. He eagerly volunteered for the occasional snake hunt.

"On those kinds of details, you got fresh air and sometimes you found fresh fruit like loquats," he said. Those occasions were rare, however, as hungry civilians usually got to them first.

7 night of the bombing things

"We went back to camp and didn't have to work anymore," he recalled. "(The Japanese) broke out Red Cross food packages ... we all got sick; dysentery. I still have it to this day."

The news of the unknown bomb had little effect on Dreasher's fellow prisoners at first, he recalled.

"The other prisoners didn't do or say anything. They didn't know what to do," he said.

Later that night one of the sailors in the camp walked to the guard shack to talk to the captors. He was gone for a very long time, Dreasher remembered.

"When he came back he told us 'It looks like the war is over'," Dreasher said.

His witnessing of an actual nuclear attack has convinced Dreasher that nuclear weapons are necessary.

"We have to keep them as leverage. In case of an emergency we've got to have them or else we'll have another bad, bad one (war),"

CORREGADOR JAPAN
6 MAY 1942 24 SEPT 1945
1276 DAYS 40 MOS
USMC 9 JAN 1940 - 31 JULY 1961
DOB 6 NOV 1912 BRAWLEY CA
STAYED JAPAN 34 MO IMPERIAL CO

Covite Marine P.I.
Hq. 3rd Bn, 4th Marines
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Estimates of those who died in Hiroshima from the bomb, called "Little Boy," range up to 140,000. Three days later, on Aug. 9, 1945, an estimated 70,000 people were killed when the "Fat Man" bomb hit Nagasaki. Japan surrendered on Aug. 14 and World War II ended.