

CORONADO Eagle



FOR THOSE WHO FOUGHT FOR IT, FREEDOM HAS A FLAVOR THE PROTECTED WILL NEVER KNOW.

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Coronado Royale Resident Chuck Dreasher (81) Witnessed Nagasaki Atomic Bombing

by Christine Guimond

Chuck Dreasher, an 81-year old Coronado Royale resident, said the sight of the mushroom cloud over Nagasaki was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

He did not know then about the

effects of radiation fallout, or that seeing the flash would greatly reduce his eyesight later. He did not know that the U.S. had dropped an atomic bomb (dubbed "Little Boy") on Hiroshima that killed 140,000 people, just three days earlier. He just hoped that it would bring

an end to the war. It did.

On August 9, 1945, Mr. Dreasher was weeding a hillside about a half mile away from his prison camp in Fukuoka on the Japanese island of Kyushu. His captor, a Japanese guard, fled when he saw several American carrier planes to the south.

Watching the planes make their way across the sky and out of sight, Dreasher sat down and ate a lunch of stuffed rice balls that the guard had also abandoned. He saw the blast at 11:02 am.

"All I saw was a flash," Dreasher recalled. "It hit the ground and out of the

column of dust and dirt came a huge cloud (of white vapor) like a mushroom."

Frank W. Chinnock wrote in a February 1969 article entitled, *Nagasaki: The Forgotten Bomb*, that at the time of the bomb, Japan's Supreme War Council was meeting in a heated debate in Tokyo. Although Hiroshima had shocked them deeply, most of the military leaders still argued that the country should fight on, regardless of cost. Fanatic and blind to the last, their hopes were now pinned to a fatal misconception of U.S. strength and resolve. "I am convinced," said War

Nagasaki, Continued on Page 7.



Chuck Dreasher was a POW in Camp #21, Fukuoka, Japan, when he saw the U.S. drop the Nagasaki bomb named "Fat Man", on August 9, 1945. Three days later he was moved to Camp #22.

CHUCK DREASHER
Coronado Royale
299 Prospect Pl., #230
Coronado, CA 92118-1997
(619) 436-0679/437-1777

Nagasaki, Continued from Page 1.

Minister Korechika Anami, "that the Americans only had one bomb."

The Nagasaki atomic bomb (dubbed "Fat Man"), boomed to a height of 45,000 feet in the sky and killed a reported 70,000 people. It became the most important event in Dreasher's life as the Japanese surrendered on Aug. 14, 1945, and set him free. He had been a prisoner of war for 1,276 days.

After the bombing, the prisoners were taken off work detail and received a feast of Red Cross food packages, some of which were contaminated.

"We ate too much," he said matter of factly, "and most of us got dysentery."

Chuck Dreasher joined the Marine Corps on Jan. 9, 1940. He was 28. By the end of April he was in the Philippines.

Dreasher said that none of the men were surprised by the Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.

"Our ships saw the Japanese going around the northern part of the Philippines and knew that they were headed for Pearl Harbor. They weren't notified or given any sort of a chance," in his opinion. "I think the government wanted them to bomb Pearl Harbor so we could have a war and make money. It was a dirty, dirty, dirty trick"

Three days later, the Philippine Navy yard was bombed.

"I was on Bataan when Pearl Harbor got hit. I came back to Clark when it got blown off the map," Dreasher recalled. "They killed 2,500 civilians out of 7,000, one Marine, and 130 service people that I know of, plus all the ships that went down, and all the men that went down with the ships."

He was ordered to the Navy yard to assess the damage. While there, he and an ensign hauled the injured to a hospital three miles away in a pick-up truck. Then, he went to Corregidor for beach defense.

Corregidor, 26 miles west of Manila, is the largest of five islands in the South Pacific and stood as a guard for the Philippines against Japanese invasions from the China Sea. The island, as prepared, served as the final battleground with the Japanese after U.S. troops withdrew from Manila and prepared for a long siege while waiting for reinforcements. The help never came; most of it would have come from Pearl Harbor. After a six-month stand-off on Corregidor, Lt. General Jonathan Wainwright surrendered the islands on May 6, 1942.

Dreasher was among the 12,000 troops who became prisoners of war by capitulation.

"After they destroyed all of our weapons we were lined up and marched to an old seaplane enclosure, called the 92nd Garage," Dreasher said with disgust. "It had very bad sanitation, there was no food, no nothing. It was unspeakable."

His second day as a POW, Dreasher was assigned to a work party on the beach to drag dead Japanese soldiers out of the water so their sabers and weapons could be salvaged.

He spoke of all that the men endured, explaining how they ate watered down rice every day and how they were given a soup every 10 days that consisted of the bones, eyes and heads of fish. Their Japanese captors ate the fish meat.

"Some men said that Uncle (Sam) isn't going to come, gave up, quit eating, and starved to death," he recalled. "It did seem like the government was more worried about Europe than it was about us."

On the one day a month that Dreasher got off, he would cut the other prisoners hair, horse-trading for cigarettes to break up and put in his pipe.

"Sometimes I would trade for two inch grasshoppers to eat and I could get whale blubber through the black market. Someone got the weekly Osaka newspaper, so I heard some news" he said thoughtfully. "It was those things that saved my life."

Sheer determination and a strong physical body conditioned by years of farm work also contributed, according to Dreasher. When he was taken prisoner Dreasher stood six feet tall and weighed 165 pounds. When he was released two and a half years later, he weighed 108 pounds.

The years since have taken their toll on Dreasher; he now suffers from

nightmares and medical problems, such as an equilibrium condition caused by continual beating of the head and ears; Dreasher's walk sometimes becomes a "wobbly" stagger.

He said many of his nightmares force him to relive the fear and "bombings, shellings and people getting killed." He recalled hundreds of close calls... a 300-pound bomb exploding within 30 feet of his vehicle.

Seeing the atomic blast some 35 miles away, also caused blindness in his left eye and partial blindness in his right eye.

When he returned to the States on Oct. 20, 1945 he received a welcome home letter from President Truman and took a year to rest. Dreasher decided to reenlist in the Marine Corps and returned to active duty in Nov. 1946.

"I knew there was something wrong with me. They offered to give me 60 percent disability," he explained. "I said no, they messed me up they were going to keep me. I couldn't have been a rated man on the outside, so I stayed in and beat the system."

Dreasher retired as a Master Sergeant in July 1961 and began a career with the U.S. Civil Service until retirement in 1976.

Chuck was commander of the Disabled American Veterans at Oceanside, is a member and donor to the MCRD Museum Historical Society, and worked at the local VA Hospital for 10 years.