

## **American Prisoners Looked Like Dazed Hunted Animals**

### **Lt. Philip I. Clark Jr. Tells Rotary of an Emotional Experience As Americans Freed From Japanese Prisons Get First Thrill From Their Liberty**

October 11, 1945

“They were quiet, dazed and looked like hunted animals.” That is how the trainload of American prisoners of war impressed Lt. Philip I. Clark, Jr. As he walked along the station platform there in Japan, Lt. Clark had expected his fellow Americans would be an excited, cheering lot. But no, they were like hunted animals, he writes.

His letter to his wife, Frances Palmer Clark is a most interesting account of his experiences soon after the end of the war when he was engaged in the transfer of prisoners of war, of various nationalities, from Japan to the center set up in Okinawa for their reception after so long and so trying a period of imprisonment.

Excerpts from his letter follow:

Enroute from Nagasaki; Japan to Okinawa, carrying former P.O.Ws to the center they have set up in Okinawa from which they send the ex-P.O.Ws to their homes all over the world. With us is the British Carrier- “HMS Speaker” loaded to the very flight deck.

The morning one of their ex-pows died and they held the burial this afternoon. What a tragic thought- the British Sgt. who died had been captured in '42- lived through three years of hell and then to die on his first lap to freedom and home. Many of them will die.

Our passengers are mostly Dutch- from Holland and Java- and then we have 25 or 30 Americans (civilians), Army, Navy and Marines. Six of the Americans are survivors of the cruiser Houston. She really went through hell. In 1942 she was between Sumatra and Java- the Dutch told them that there was a small unit of the Japanese Navy going away from the Houston.

A few hours later the whole Japanese Navy bore down on them- Battle ships and Cruisers fired point blank at them; Destroyers circled them and fired guns and torpedoes into her hull. They pushed her so close to land that shore batteries opened up on them.

It was the Japanese Navy on its way to invade Java. The Houston accounted for several of the ships and went down still firing after one hour and twenty minutes of sure death.

The few survivors have gone through worse since. One of the men aboard was the only one in his gun turret to live and he was blown free. He said that many times when he was nearly dead from pneumonia, again with dysentery and again with malaria and was being beaten because he couldn't work- he wished he had gone down with the Houston. All of their stories are much the same- just some worse than others.

Yesterday I spent from 0730 to 1800 on the dock and checked out 1200 P.O.W.'s that came in that day on four trains. The second train load of Aussies was a pitiful sight- about fifty were stretcher cases. The next train was British in fairly good shape. They went wild over the orchestra, the food and the nurses.

I (as was everyone) was all excited to meet the next train which was loaded with Americans. We expected the typical G.I. Joe- tired and sick- but I still expected cheering and all the typical American ways. I walked by 4 train cars and finally turned away before I realized that they were Americans.

They were quiet, dazed and looked like hunted animals. I was shocked. A tough old warrant Machinist Mate from the Houston saluted me, and when I said "Oh, for Petesakes, knock that off" and shook his hand- he broke down and cried. Another Navy man of about forty and I were talking about how he had a wife and four children in San Francisco whom he had not seen since December 1941.

The orchestra played San Francisco Here I Come and he shook like a leaf- sat down on the train platform and bawled like a baby. A big Texan had to be led around, he was in such a daze. The night before he had broken out of the prison camp and had caught the Jap Commander of the camp and had beat him to death.

One of the Britishers gave me the enclosed Jap money- the equivalent of 3 to 6 days pay for 14 hours a day work on the railroad in Thailand and in the coal mine in the Java camp and in the Zinc factory in Moji on Kyushu. His right arm and hand had been crushed once when he had malaria and a temperature of 104 degrees, he had fainted at his work in the Zinc factory. Actually I heard hundreds of stories like that- I could go on and on.

I returned to the ship in a downpour at 1800 to find that my section had the boat-patrol-watch and my watch started at 1830. So until 2230 that night I rode in the rain that came in buckets. We had to tow two Jap fishing vessels ashore and secure them to the docks.

We thought we saw something moving along the shore so we roared over to a long Jap boat with five Jap soldiers on it. We flashed our searchlight on them and myself and one of the boat crew stuck Tommy-guns over the side into their faces. They were scared to death- bowed and bowed so much that the boat rocked.

We motioned them ashore and followed them with our boat nearly touching theirs. Their boat was propelled by one long oar astern and you should have that little Nip work that oar.

I just came off watch now. We will get into Okinawa tomorrow afternoon since we are making knots. What happens after that we do not know. We will unload our patients and passengers and then just wait for new orders.