

WW II Experiences – Indonesia

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WW II Roundtable

The story that you will hear tonight is painful and it is long. It is painful for me, perhaps not for you. I was in prison for close to three years, and I don't normally talk about this. My family knows almost nothing about my experiences. My wife is not here. Perhaps she didn't want to come. I don't know why, but she doesn't know what I am about to tell you either. By the same token, my story is not as bad as some of the stories that you might hear from the War. I am still here. Those that gave their most cannot be here tonight to tell you anything at all.

Let's go back to history. I was born a Dutchman and I am now a naturalized American. The Dutch came to Indonesia, to the Island of Java in 1598, about 40 years before the first Englishman came to the North American continent. They were looking for spices. They found the Portuguese, expelled the Portuguese, and by about 1625, the Dutch were masters of the archipelago. The archipelago of Indonesia is very large. If you superimpose the whole chain of islands on the map of the United States, it will reach from New York to San Francisco. Of course these are mostly small islands and most of the area is sea rather than land. The population is very large. In 1940 there were 40 million people in Indonesia. Now it is more than twice as much. No one knows exactly how much it is now. That basically is the history of the archipelago.

Now my own. My father was a physician and he entered missionary service, Dutch Reformed Church, and came to the Island of Java, in Central Java, in 1922. I was born there, the second of his children in 1930. I am going to pass out a map, two maps. On the front of it I clipped out of book an advertisement with the name of the city where I was born and raised, now Yogyakarta (Djokjakarta, Jogjakarta). Unless you see it in front of you, you will not remember it for more than 30 seconds. So pass this around and look at maps number 2 and 10. there is some tape in there that will tell you what I am talking about.

Now we go to the war. They tell you that the war started on December 7 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and that the Japanese started the war. Neither of those two facts are correct. The Japanese moved into the Southern part of Indo-China, which was then French, on July 25, 1941. The next day, July 26, President Roosevelt froze all the Japanese assets in the United States. Japan is totally dependent on imported oil, then as well as now. They got most of their oil from the United States. That source dried up. Japanese stocks, the Japanese had seen this coming, in terms of the Navy they were about 18 months. In terms of the Army, they were about four months. In terms of civilian supplies, they were even less than that. Japan was in a corner or against the wall which ever way you want to look at it. Of course, they were there at their by own choosing since they had started the war in China and we wanted them out of China. If I say we, I speak about the Americans not about the Dutch specifically.

There was an easy source of oil for Japan, the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch East Indies had an annual production in 1939 of 8 million tons. The Japanese needed in 1942 7.9 million tons. The Indonesian production could easily be increased because they had large oil wells and reserves that were not tapped. Before the action of the United States, the Japanese, the Japanese politicians, had been down in Indonesia and had demanded Indonesian oil. Roosevelt knew that the only way that he could get to the Japanese if the Japanese were not able to get any other oil. The Dutch refused Japan any oil.

When did the Dutch lose the war against Japan? Not on July 26, 1941, Roosevelt's decree. They lost it on the tenth of May, 1940 because that's when the Mother country, the Netherlands in Europe was overrun by the Germans. There were only about a 100,000 Dutch

and most of those civilians in the entire archipelago. Needless to say, the Japanese could brush us away like you brush away a fly. The Dutch nevertheless told the Japanese that they could not get any oil and they were backed up by guarantees from the British and the Americans. Well, these guarantees proved nothing. In 1941 in December, in Pearl Harbor a considerable portion of the American fleet went to the bottom. When the Japanese attacked the Philippines, on the first day of the war, MacArthur lost half of his air force, and the scandal has never been explained. Japanese came over and bombed him after he had knowledge that Japan had started the war. The United States had 34 submarines in Philippine waters. The Philippine waters were crawling with Japanese shipping as Japanese were landing troops in the Philippines and had their fleet around the Philippines. The American submarines could not score a single kill. The American torpedoes were no good. The submariners saw the torpedoes through their periscope bump against the Japanese ships, jump out of the water, and not explode. The Dutch had 11 submarines. Some of those were very small and very old, coastal submarines. They produced the first sinkings of Japanese ships in December of 1941. This is within a few weeks of the beginning of the war, and they produced sinkings after that. Their torpedoes worked.

The British had almost 140,000 men in Malaya, Singapore and the Malayan peninsula where the Japanese first attacked. The Japanese were so scornful of them that the initial plans were to land four divisions, 80,000 men in Malaya. They said well we don't need that many to defeat the British. They only landed three divisions, 60,000 men, and on the 15th of February, Singapore fell. On the 10th of December two large British warships, battleship Prince of Wales, and the battle cruiser Repulse were sunk off the coast of Malaya by the Japanese. So much for relying on guarantees from the British and the Americans.

Significantly, the first attacks by the Japanese on the Dutch East Indies were on the island of Tarakan, which is off Borneo and which is the site of large oil wells. And they had their first and only parachutists landing in Palembang, which is on the island Sumatra, and which until the end of the war supplied 90% of the aviation gasoline for the Japanese Air force and the Japanese Navy. Following Tarakan and Palembang, they attacked Balikpapan which is also in Borneo which is the site for the major refineries where the Tarakan oil was refined. It is a little bit South but it is on the mainland. They found the refineries blown. The Dutch had known that they were coming and had destroyed the refineries. The Japanese rounded up every Dutchman that they could find, mostly civilian employees of the refineries, and a small army detachment and with machine guns drove them into the sea and machine gunned them. There was one survivor, a powerful swimmer who swam way out to sea dodging machine gun bullets, was in the water for more than 24 hours swimming parallel to the coast and landed at some other point and was rescued.

In March of 1942, the Japanese landed on the island of Java. The city of Yogyakarta where I lived at the time was declared an open city because it was not defensible. I was a small boy 11 years old, small for my age, with very blond hair. The Javanese used to call me "kepala kedjoe" which means cheese head. I was at the edge of the city in a slit trench because a Japanese plane was overhead and bombing anything in sight. Nevertheless, I slid out of the slit trench and went into some bushes and saw the capitulation of the city. The local commanding officer, a lieutenant general of some sort, drove up in a large Harley-Davidson. Harley-Davidsons were routine equipment for the Javanese army and police forces. He was in a side car. He was a middle-aged portly individual. He handed over the keys of the city, such as it is, and capitulated to the Japanese. I saw that and am probably the only living survivor of that particular event. Not until after the war was over did we find out that the Japanese imprisoned him. They also imprisoned the governor of the State (Province) of Yogyakarta which is a fairly large and populous State. And in about six weeks both of them were killed. They were tortured because they refused to reveal information that they didn't have. The Japanese couldn't believe

that things were going so easy. They said "Where are your other troops? Where are your buried weapons? Where are your resources?" They said "We don't have any. This is it." They said "We don't believe you." Six weeks later both of them were dead. We didn't find that out until after the war.

So the Japanese moved in and at first very little happened. Big signs started to appear. The Japanese were masters of propaganda warfare, and they had great big posters that they put everywhere. On those posters they had two ovals like human eyes with a blue circle in this, blue eyes, and under it said "Mata, mata, moesi" which is Malaysian, which means "the eyes of the enemy." We realized that the future was not going to be very good. On the day the Japanese moved into Yogyakarta, which happened early in the morning, I earlier told you that I saw the capitulation, I moved out of the slit trench a little bit later. There was a bunch of Japanese officers sitting along the road having a picnic. I walked up to them, a little boy 11 years old, you know 11 year old boys, they know everything. It is before the onset of puberty with its uncertainties. They are now old enough to understand their world. They know how to manipulate their parents. Everything is going their way, and I didn't see why Japanese would be any different than my parents. So, I went to them, and they gave me a piece of candy and joked with me a little bit. I didn't understand a word that they said, and they didn't understand a word I said, but nevertheless I had a pleasant experience.

That evening as Japanese troops, one column after another, marched through the main road of the city, remember we were located on the main road, we heard a lot of noise outside. Everyone told me to stay in, but I am not a very cautious individual. My friend, Mack Blackburn, I love to take him in my little red two seater; as I drive he cringes and he grimaces and kicks the floorboard looking for brake pedals and I love it. So, cautious I was not, and I went out and I saw the, I called it "native", not a politically correct word, the Javanese population lining the side of the road, shouting the Japanese on "Deliver us from the colonial empire of the bad Dutch." I was very much stricken with that. I was very deeply grieved with that. My father was a missionary who did everything possible for these people, and here they were shouting on our enemies. But, let me say something terrible. One of the worst things that happened to me during the War was that it corroded my belief in the fundamental humanity of man. If the Russians were to move into Indianapolis tomorrow and go along 86th street here and if they were to promise to deliver us from everything in Washington and everything else, maybe most of you would be standing there and shouting them on as well. Think about that if you wish.

That night I had probably the worst nightmare of my life. I don't really know why, but I had a terrible one and it proved to be premonitory. Before the year was out, all Dutchman were in prison, civilian internees. In the beginning, things went reasonably well. There wasn't really all that much food. We had one section of camp where all the young mothers with very small children, newborns up to about a year of age, were located. Of course, there wasn't much milk, there wasn't much formula, and I really decided that things weren't going well when about four months later that particular department was closed. All the kids were dead, gastroenteritis, feeding disturbances, this that and the other. They were all dead. I stayed with my mother, my younger brother, all three together for about six or eight months.

After that I was separated. I was now 12 years old and I was a dangerous man! The Japanese systematically separated any male over 11 years old from their parents, and the rest of the War I was on my own. My father of course was in an entirely different place. He was in Malaya on his way to the Burma railroad, but I won't talk about that. I will only talk about my own experiences. We worked for the Japanese. I was employed growing vegetables, daikon, the great big white radish. I know all about it. I know how to grow it. I grew it for the Japanese kitchens. The Japanese fertilized, or made us fertilize, the vegetables with what the Japanese call "night soil". Which is, you go to the latrine and you pick up all the human excrement, suitably

dilute it, carry it out to the field and spread it over it, human manure. The Japanese, the Chinese, and the Koreans have been doing that for thousands of years and are still doing that today. If you travel to Northern China, which I did last year, you will see carts, great big drums on wheels, with a man sitting on top and a little donkey pulling it. They call them "honey pots." Honey is human manure. Anyways, let me see, I am not going to read to you anything except until the end.

But, now becomes the most difficult part. The food gradually became less. In early 1945, the diet had sunk to 600 calories. Let me summarize. I went into the camp at 12 years old and came out at 15. I had grown in the meantime, from 12 to 15, one-half of one inch and all of that during the first year. After that growth ceased. My weight when I went in was the same as when I came out three years later, two years 10 months, I had not gained single bit. As a matter of fact, immediately after the war when food became more readily available, I started to lose weight because some of the weight that I had was edema fluid. We ate everything. Everything that moved, cats, dogs, snakes, birds. Towards the end of the war, I used to take flying ants, termites, and take them by the two wings and hold the body over a candle until it sputters nicely and take the fried body and munch it. Incidentally, throughout Asia, termites are considered a delicacy so it is not such a terrible thing. It is just that we are not used to it. After the war, many years after the war, here in Indianapolis, I met an English physician who had been sent out by the English government immediately after the war to Singapore, and she was sitting on a veranda there in Singapore next to some other people who had gone through the camp time, Englishmen. And, all of a sudden someone said "Hey there's a snake under your chair!" and as she tells the story with relish, the man looked under the chair and said "Eh, not edible." The problem is that, and I immediately told her, "That's not a good joke. It doesn't fit. There is no such thing as an inedible snake. They are all edible."

I saw terrible things. In the camp where I was, we had a combination of old men, anyone over 55 which would include 9 out of 10 people in this audience, myself included, and we had Roman Catholic nuns and we had boys, between the ages of 12 and 16. We started out with 1200 old men. By the end of the war, there were 350 left. Of those, another hundred died because help for them came too late and rehabilitation and food came too late and they still died. That loss is a lot worse than was suffered by the USS Indianapolis. There were also in that camp 750 boys. I was one of them. I was in that camp only a couple of weeks. Fortunately, I got out of it. Of those boys, only about 3 or 5 died. You know what happened. It is not only the difference in body size, a smaller body can live on less food, but the fact that the older men and the boys were fed at different times. We got more food. They were sacrificed. They died so that we might live. This was systematically done.

At the end of the war, my mother, a fairly large, rather heavy boned woman was down to 85 pounds. She was completely psychotic when I first saw her a couple of days after the war was over when we were reunited. She didn't know this from that or anything, completely off the map. She had been denied any medical treatment. That is to say, any drugs or any medication because she was older than 40, she was 42 at the time, and no medications or anything was given to older people, "You are going to die anyway." So she was probably not very far from death. It says in your outline at some point, and I will come back to that, that the ending of the war as it did from the two atomic bombs made it possible for my family, my mother, most likely myself, most likely my father, to survive. We would not have lived very much longer.

Let's pick up some other things. We ate everything. Every day we checked the great big blackboard at the main passage way through the camp where everything had to come in and everything had to come out, we checked the death toll. Remember, the Dutch in Indonesia were the managerial class. They were not the carpenters or the blacksmiths. They were the bank managers, the teachers, the doctors, and the like because the lower ranks of course could be filled

from the local population. So a very selected population. So such and such died last night, bank director during life, such and such died, a teacher in such and such a school. The entire upper class disappeared. The entire managerial class disappeared. Some days 18 or 19 names up there. The Japanese commander would come in "Ah, 19 deaths" means 19 less rations for tomorrow. So, it was fairly systematic.

I saw some of those old men completely maddened by hunger. Now this is a horrible story and if you do not want to hear it, close your ears. There was a little creek that ran through the camp that was of course our latrine. All of the latrines opened into that creek so that all the human fecal material went down the creek and they put themselves at the side of the creek and looked for grains of corn that had not been fully digested. If you have diarrhea, the corn comes out. The little corn husks and maybe there is a little bit in it, take them out of the water and eat them. And, other terrible things that I am not going to detail.

I got out of that particular camp and went to a wood cutting camp where we cut wood for the Japanese kitchens, firewood. It was a mahogany forest, cultivated mahogany about 10 to 12 years old. It takes about 30 to 40 years to harvest a mahogany tree. They had been planted and they weren't very big about, oh, 6 to 8 inches across. We systematically cut them down, cut them into pieces about 3 feet long and they were transported as firewood. That is of course economic warfare, destroy the resources for the future.

In that camp, I developed pellagra, a disease that none of you know. If there are any physicians in the audience let me know because the medical records of what I experienced I have on paper with me here the medical records that I have made available to Indiana University so they are in the public domain and anyone can see them. On August 24, it took that long for the capitulation to reach the Indies, we finally became aware of the fact that Japan had indeed not won the war. Unfortunately, that day I had another severe attack of dysentery. I was totally incapacitated. That night, the night of 24th, the camp was evacuated. We went down the mountain, and I was put together with another fellow, a colleague of mine, who, remember it was a woodcutting camp, had injured one of his legs with an axe and he could not walk either, a leg wound. We were put in two blankets, the two blankets between two bamboo poles and four men on it and we were carried down the mountain to the railroad station to be evacuated to the base camp. There was a bright moon that night. The moon was low over the horizon. The moon in the tropics is often not like it is here with a full moon of gold and yellow, it is more bluish, a steel blue in color, it is much more menacing. As I moved down, down the mountain road with the road on both sides, the moon of course, following me through the trees on both sides. I saw this shiny, cold steel, lead balloon move following me. It is an event in a time of my life that I will not forget. I do not know what it means.

This is as much as I want to say about my experiences. If you want to know more, you can ask me. But let me summarize and make a few other comments and a few other remarks. The adjustment to civilian life after the imprisonment was very difficult. First, we had to get rid of our vermin. All of us were verminous, we had body lice and we had bedbugs. Second, we had to learn how to wear shoes. You don't know how difficult it is for someone who has walked for years on his bare feet to wear shoes. You develop blisters and everything. You go to a country that is very poor and you see a man without shoes, don't give him a pair of shoes. He doesn't need that. It would be painful to him. It took me six months to learn how to wear shoes again. I had to get rid of my diarrhea. Everyone in the camp had diarrhea. Between you and me, the diarrhea has never left me, and when I retired from Indiana University in 1993 for health reasons, the reason was diarrhea. Again this is public record and the record is available to you here.

We went back to the Netherlands. I went to school there. I went to Medical School. I came to the United States in 1956. I had \$40 in my pocket, but of course the capital that I

brought along with me was my Medical Diploma. I retired in 1993 as Professor at the Indiana University School of Medicine and here I am.

I have three further comments. One, do you have that paper here that was sent out on me? I would like you to indulge me and tell me that I am not this ugly! Number two, during the war in 1941, the American government picked up all Japanese and people of Japanese ancestry on the West coast and moved them into camps inland. One hundred and ten thousand Japanese were in prison. There is no doubt in anyone's mind, my own included, that it was wrong to do that. The United States Government has acknowledged this wrong and several years ago in the early '80s several billion dollars was set aside. They were paid some reparations for property loss and each person that had been in that camp or his son's or daughters or next of kin received \$20,000. Not a very large amount of money, but they were well treated in these camps. There was perfect medical attention. There certainly were no beatings; we had numerous beatings. There certainly was no malnutrition, severe malnutrition. We, not only the Dutch prisoners of war, the British prisoners of war, the Australian prisoners of war, sued the Japanese government for a similar amount of money. We got absolutely no where.

The third comment, and this is the only thing I am going to read. This is at the end of the State of Health problems that I detailed for Indiana University. This is in the public record. You are not going to like what you are going to hear. I am not here to make you like what I am saying but to make you listen. "War related suffering is profitable only to bystanders. Being of the Calvinist persuasion, I do not believe that suffering ennobles or is a cause for redemption. It is merely a bleak twist of fate and is best not spoken of or referred to. All human action is vitiated by self interest and is therefore morally suspect. Salvation is by faith and faith alone and nothing else is central to the Calvinist construction of moral reality. I cannot but see the elevation of suffering as a device to generate sympathy as a sordid business and have to bite my tongue on reviewing certain portions of the Holocaust literature. I should hope that considerations be developed on review of the above mentioned material (which is my health record) will be based on the medical facts and the medical facts alone and will not be tinged by pity or sympathy which I would find patronizing and unacceptable."

I have been long, I have been faithful, and you have been kind. Thank you very much.

Questions:

Question: Why are you not writing in book about this because your experiences are too valuable to be lost?

Answer: I don't think you heard the last minute of my presentation. I do not believe my experiences are valuable.

Response: I think they are.

Answer (cont): By the same token let me make clear that I am a member of the Asian Art Society of the Indianapolis Museum of Art. As a matter of fact, I am currently on the Board but will be off the Board in another month. As one of the things that we study is Japanese Art, I am fairly knowledgeable about Japanese Art and for that matter Japanese History. I do not hate the Japanese. If you hate someone, the hate consumes you, not the object that you hate. I have had Japanese friends after the war. I have had some very good ones as a matter of fact who came to study here in the United States. Hate is not a useful occupation. I am not saying for the first years after the war that I did not indeed hate them. I did, but it died out. We have done terrible