

*Omuta*

*August 17<sup>th</sup> 1945*

*My Dear Mother and all,*

*I suppose this letter will reach you before I arrive home, I am writing this two days after working in a Japanese Carbide Factory, yesterday I felt sure that the war was over, today I am more or less convinced that it is, that is why I am writing this.*

*Even now there has been no official announcement, but in the complete absence of air raids for 48 hours and other little incidents (such as an issue of soap*



and cigarettes) that have occurred I feel sure that I shall be on my way home in the next month or two.

I can't write a letter and give you a 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  year summary of my P.O.W. life because it would mean writing a book. I hope you are all well, and me? I am O.K. When I will get this posted I have no idea because to all intents and purposes I am still a prisoner under Japanese guards.

Incidentally I drafted this letter on toilet paper and am now re-writing it at Manila and since I cannot get hold of a decent pen to write with I know you won't mind pencil.

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One of the Japs hinted pretty strongly that the  
"Shensha - squosh mati - youmi" (War - wait a  
little - finish) and for the second night in succession  
I hardly slept a wink, but what is the loss of a little  
sleep now when there is "Sagis ni" (no work).

I do hope everyone at home is 'in the pink' and that  
everything 'in the garden is wonderful'.

Please give my kind regards to the neighbours and  
thank them for their good wishes received in your  
letters. I received two letters from Dorothy Eilbeck,  
and the last full length letter I received from home



was dated July 30<sup>th</sup> 1943 reaching me at Haigo  
Lanoma on Dec 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944.

The last Airmail card I received on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1945  
dated Oct 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944.

Whether I shall receive any more mail now I do not  
know. That there have been quite a few cards and  
letters sent I have no doubt, but it is quite probable  
that a lot of mail has been destroyed en route or in  
Air raids on Japan, the same way as Red Cross  
Supplies, at least it is as good an excuse as any for  
the Japanese.



*I received a P.C. from Mr Watson last June, in fact I have received altogether 10 letters and 8 cards since my first mail arrived on July 9<sup>th</sup> 1944.*

*You may guess how much behind the times I shall be when I get home. You had better put on one side all the week-end newspapers you can find from Dec 8<sup>th</sup> 1941 onwards. The last newspaper I saw was the Daily Express with the headlines - Japan Declares War on Britain and U.S.A. -.*

*And what has it brought the stupid little yellow idiots? At least thousands upon thousands of destitute homeless even in this small town of Omuta, and a completely wrecked industrial area. We have*



had a few narrow 'Squeaks' and have come through O.K. By we I mean those in this camp. There are thousands of others who have not survived, indeed we can thank God for our preservation.

Aug 18<sup>th</sup>

No official confirmation yet, but nobody seems to expect it now, it is just more or less taken for granted.

We have received Red Cross food supplies, a lorry load of vegetables and extra rice rations. Some Red



Cross clothing came in last night and Individual Food Parcels are promised for today or tomorrow. - 'I'd like to believe it' - It would be for the first time we had received any Red Cross supplies not pilfered by the Japs.

I will be sending a cable as soon as possible, but for the time being it is just a matter of waiting, and since there is no work to do, apart from keeping the camp clean and tidy, reading and resting is the order of the day.

The food consists of the usual bowl of rice and soup augmented by Red Cross food. After all this time



of rice and soup a tin of 'bully' is an almost unheard of luxury, but one has to be careful. I myself have had no ill effects of this rich food, but quite a number are undergoing very uncomfortable internal disorders.

I suppose there is a chance of being home by Xmas, if so, I should have about a 3 inch growth of hair, more or less presentable, I hope. We have been issued with combs but I am afraid it will be quite a few weeks before we can put them in use. I shall just add to this letter as anything of interest crops up.

Aug 20<sup>th</sup>



We received Red Cross food packages today but quite a number of articles had been removed, these Japs go a 'bundle' on chocolate hence there was none in the box.

One or two other items were missing together with cigarettes, still this parcel will add to our diet for a few days.

Aug 21<sup>st</sup> 1945

Nothing much doing today except the usual roll calls morning and night. The following was read out by the



*Japanese Sergeant :-*

*Typewritten copy enclosed.*

*(very kindly typed for me by one of the Yanks on  
board USS Cape of Gloucester)*

*August 24<sup>th</sup>*

*Have been told that American aircraft will be  
flying over tomorrow to drop supplies and troops  
(another Japanese bed-time story I think).*

*All factory clothing has been handed in (a suit of  
sack cloth) and replaced by 2 shirts, 2 pr*



underpants and suit of gaberdine material - quite smart!

Aug 25<sup>th</sup>

The Jap sergeant nicknamed the Yank (because of his American accent when he speaks English) has arranged a party for 50 homeless Japanese children of the district.

This will mean a small contribution of a spoonful of powdered milk, a stick of chewing gum, a cube of sugar, or a yen or two (a yen is only the proceeds of ten days work!). Of course I have accumulated a few yen during the past 22 months, because although



we were able to spend a few sen during the first week or so after we arrived in Japan we have been unable to put it to any use since. I must have about 70 or 80 Yen in the bank, - for what it is worth.

Aug 26<sup>th</sup>

The Japanese guards are still here but they are not doing any Guard Duties. The Kiddies party was quite a success. First they had a concert and singing and dancing, and a make-believe juggler, selections by the "band" followed by a meal.

Menu: - Rice ball, soup, chocolate, sweet milk and chewing gum. What a meal! They were then

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presented with a box containing prisoners cast off clothing (consisting mostly of patches).

All went back to their dug-outs (their homes being in ashes) having had quite a happy and enjoyable afternoon.

Aug 27<sup>th</sup>

Finished the Red Cross food last night. An American 'Liberator' flew over the camp this evening,

but the only thing he dropped was a hint that he knew we were here. We painted large letters P.W. on the roofs the other day.



Aug 28<sup>th</sup>

Although I have put on 11 lbs since Aug 15<sup>th</sup> I can see I shall be losing it again if these Yanks don't drop the promised supplies. A bowl of rice and a bowl of water for two meals today.

I don't know what is on the menu for tonight but I don't think I shall need to wear my 'tail coat' whatever it is.

- While I was writing this I had to go and see what all the commotion was about outside. A huge B29 was circling round and coming lower.



Dozens of blokes were swarming over the roofs waving frantically. Personally I am not taking any such risks at this stage. However after flying low over the camp he circled round and (as seen by the fellows on the roof) dropped quite a number of parcels by parachute, but not near this camp.

About a mile away there is a bigger camp of some 2000 Yanks, Aussies, Dutch and British and it was there that the goods were delivered. Maybe there will be something for this camp.



I have received two post cards, congratulations to the newly weds. Although the news did come as a bit of a shock I half expected to find my baby sister married when I got home. I would like to have been present at the ceremony. However I wish them every success and happiness.

Talking of family affairs, my first letter brought the news of Eileen's baby. I guess his birthday must be on or about 21<sup>st</sup> March. I am anxious to meet

Earle, give him my love. He has probably got a disight more hair than I have just now. When I first read Doris's letter I thought his name was Herbert and she had written 'Erbe for short.



There have been rumours going all day and every day regarding a move from here but I suppose we are all very impatient to get away. When all said and done it is only 10 days since the war officially ended.

Today there is talk about opening a canteen but from what I can gather it will be more like a haberdashery dept., mirrors, combs, razor blades etc. They will try to get cigarettes and beer.

We must wait and see. If these Japs promised us anything we would know for certain that we would never even see it let alone be able to buy it. You will



see then that a rumour is more hopeful than a promise.

I am glad the Japs haven't told us we are moving 'soon', because a Japanese 'soon' means anything between 1 year hence and the next 100 years.

Having complained about the rations today the Japs say we can have an extra bag of rice a day. This seems quite important to us today, but probably quite ridiculous by the time I arrive home.

Aug 29<sup>th</sup>

No sooner had I left off writing yesterday when a B29 came over and signalled to us (by opening his



bomb hatches as he flew over at about 250ft) that he was going to drop something. The first drop was pamphlets.

The parachute landed in the camp but not one pamphlet, these were collected from the surrounding area. Next came bales of boots and clothing, then 50 gallon drums of canned foods, chocolate, chewing gum and cigarettes etc., - 3 days supply.

The pamphlets tell us that the Japanese Government has surrendered. You have no idea how excited everybody was while the machine was flying over dropping the goods. It was amusing and yet pitiful to



see full grown men jumping around and waving their arms like 5 year olds.

Since some of the 'shutes didn't open many of the packages landed fairly heavily. In fact two came through the roofs in the camp and one through an empty house on the other side of the fence.

This morning after a good soup with our rice we each received 80 cigarettes, chewing gum and chocolate.

More to come including boots and clothing.

American aircraft have been flying around all day and everyone is on 'top of the world' so to speak.

It is a pleasure being able to smoke a decent cigarette. The 'Ration Wagon' (B29) has



dropped another 40 containers on 17 camps but nothing here, we are still hoping.

Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945

International and American Red Cross delegates were inspecting the camp yesterday, they say we will be having another air drop in a day or two. They told us that so far this was the best camp they had visited as regards accommodation but the worst for food. But as occupation troops are expected on the island on the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> we should be fairly soon



evacuated, and those who are very sick will probably be flown home.

The Jap soldiers have handed in their rifles and we have taken over guard duties. The representatives who were visiting told us about the new bomb that had been used, as a matter of fact nearly everyone heard and saw it explode but did not know at the time what it was, fortunately for us it was about 20 miles away.

Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> 1945



6 Years ago today I didn't think I would ever be in Japan writing this. Today it is pouring with rain as it was yesterday, so the chances of any airborne supplies is not so good.

Last night we were informed that the Japanese had signed the peace terms. We have taken over the camp lock stock and barrel. Our own guards are on duty with Japanese rifles, the Japanese soldiers are to leave the camp within 48 hours. They say there will be a Japanese merchant selling curios coming to the camp tomorrow.

Sept 4<sup>th</sup>



Half past five the 'Ration Wagon' flew over and the goods had been delivered by 6.30 am. We had fruit juice with our rice this morning.

Although it was pouring with rain again at 9 o'clock, three more B29's flew over with more groceries. These aircraft dropped supplies here and at 17 camp.

Altogether from these 4 aircraft we have received about 70/50 gallon drums of canned goods, bales of boots, more clothes, cases of cigarettes chewing gum and chocolate etc., and the other camp received



the same from the same machines. These Yanks do things in a 'Big Way'.

Only one Japanese house slightly damaged. Of course these houses are very flimsy affairs and even though the parachutes opened O.K. the drums went right through the roof and floor as well.

We have 4 Japanese in the guard room for breaking open and attempting to get away with some cigarettes (the poor blighters are scared stiff). Maybe they think they will be treated as their own police would.

However I think the supplies we have received today will keep us going for quite a while now. In any case we have heard that an American staff car has



arrived at 17 camp so it looks as if the rumour that occupation troops will arrive today is correct.

The Japanese soldiers left the camp this morning.

Generally speaking all the men are very sympathetic towards the civilian population, but the military are the most cruel and barbarious individuals that one could possibly meet.

No doubt this is due to their system of training but I cannot see why they should be the same however brutal their training may be.

As for the civilians they are for the most part poor uneducated natives being fed, clothed and housed by



the factories, and which are themselves strictly controlled and severely rationed by the military authorities.

Here I am rambling off as though I was writing a book on the very uninteresting Japanese.

Sep 13<sup>th</sup> 1945

I have been out each day and things have been happening at breakneck speed, at least they seem to have been. We have had a big air-drop of food supplies since I was last writing this letter but not



until today did the American Evacuation Officials arrive and the occupation troops are not on this island yet.

A few chaps left the camp for Fukuoka in the hope of being flown off. It is getting very monotonous this freedom.

There is nothing to see in the town except ruins and travelling on Japanese trams and trains is simply murderous. The number of passengers on a vehicle is not limited, you can ride on the roof if you want to, even the couplings between the railway carriages are crowded with passengers.



I managed to get a couple of eggs yesterday, money as I anticipated is practically useless and the purchase cost me only 6 cigarettes. Thanks to the Yanks cigarettes are quite plentiful for us ex P.O.W's. From what I can gather we may be moving to Okinawa by aircraft carrier in a day or two so I shall resume this letter when I know what is happening.

Sep 15<sup>th</sup>

No end of hurry and bustle today, we have the Japanese cleaning the camp, doing our washing, cleaning boots etc. What a change! Leaving for



*England tomorrow at 7.45 am via Okinawa and  
Manila.*

*Sept 16<sup>th</sup>*

*We walked the first mile of our journey through the  
ruins of Omuta to the railway station and then by  
train to what was once Nagasaki (now piles of  
ruins for miles and miles - just one 600 grammes  
bomb).*

*We were met at the station by the American sailors  
and the band playing "Roll out the Barrel" -  
Coffee,*



doughnuts and ice cream unlimited at the running buffet, followed by bathing, delousing, disinfecting and issue of new kit, and then taken on board USS Cape of Gloucester (Baby Aircraft Carrier).

Here we are bound for Okinawa. We have to hand it to these Yanks they are certainly giving us a great welcome.

Sep 19<sup>th</sup>

Many happy returns of the day mother and very many of them.

Arrived Okinawa this afternoon, we will not be going off until tomorrow.



Sep 22<sup>nd</sup>

Came on board USS Bingham on the 20<sup>th</sup> and we are just sailing now 6pm bound for Manila where I hope to be able to send this letter.

Manila

Sept 29<sup>th</sup>

Have been here three days. Splendid camp and excellent food everything issued free gratis and for nothing.



Enjoying myself while waiting for the next stage of the voyage. Have nearly got writers cramp writing all this so I shall finish off and get this posted. Hope you are all still in the best of health good luck and best wishes to you all.

Your affectionate son

Edward.

xxxxxxx

ps. Just received letter from Doris dated Aug 23<sup>rd</sup>. Thanks a lot Doris, have received 21 letters and



cards altogether. I think you have received nearly all  
I have been permitted to write.

xxxxxxx Give my love to the children and remember  
me to everyone. I can see this letter writing is going  
to a big job, but if I add any more to this it will be  
a full load for one aircraft so for the time being,

Cheerio

I'll be (home soon)



*(Letter retyped by Neil Kernot on the occasion of  
his uncle Edward's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 2<sup>nd</sup> September  
1993)*