

Pte. Gyselman Gets Home for Family Reunion

By VAL WERIER

"Did I make it fast enough for you Mom?"

But mother was speechless.

Mrs. Jean E. Gyselman just looked at her son, Harry, at the C.P.R. station Tuesday evening, home from a Japanese prison camp. Then she gathered him in her arms and tears came to her eyes. Tears came to the eyes of station officials as well, hardened to such scenes.

Pte. Harry Gyselman is the second Hong Kong, Winnipeg Grenadier, to return home.

Although there was little sign of emotion from the family group waiting for their boy to come in from Vancouver, one could feel the strong undercurrent of tension.

It was their first complete family reunion in ten years. Only the father was missing. He died before the war.

Around their new home at 849 Spruce st. the reunion was a quiet, warm friendly affair. Mrs. Gyselman's heart was full. All her sons were now home. Cpl. Bill arrived from overseas a month ago; Telegraphist Don, three weeks ago.

Also present were her three daughters, Marrion, Betty and Mrs. B. Anderson.

Both Bill and Don were signed up for the Pacific. But the good news that kept them at home brought back their brother, Harry, pale and tired, but happy.

"Let us drink a toast to the reunions we have missed and to the ones that are yet to come," said Mrs. Gyselman.

Even the dog, Lucky, happy to see everyone else happy, wagged his tail in response. He had never seen Harry before.

"You look a lot better than I expected," Harry told his graying mother.

"So do you son," she replied.

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HARRY GYSELMAN

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Harry weighed only 97 pounds at one time during his imprisonment. Now he weighs 160 pounds, most of it put on since his release.

"Most of the time our diet consisted of a small bowl of boiled barley and the top part of 'dycon,' what we called an overgrown radish," related Harry. "About once a month we would get a cow's intestines. That was our meat."

He was at the prison camp of Niigata, where inmates led a dull, hopeless existence. Poorly clothed, half-starved, with no recreation, they kept no track of time. There were only 12 books in the "library."

"Another winter," said Harry, "and not many would have lived through it."

Their only spot of joy was the sound of overhead American bombers.

With others, Harry hobbled out on his crutches to cheer the Superfortresses. His feet would collapse if he walked. He was suffering from beriberi. The Japs would chase them into the air raid shelters.

Prisoners transferred from camps near Yokohama and Tokyo, told of the American destruction in those cities.

"They told us it was a beautiful sight to see," Harry stated. "To them American incendiary bombs were like a welcome snowstorm with orange instead of white snowflakes."

Harry worked in an iron foundry, which manufactured parts of railroad cars and diesel marine engines. For the last year there was little production because of shortages.

Because he sneaked away with soy beans from a nearby dock, he was confined to the jail for four days. He had no blankets, subsisted on half-rations, had to empty out latrines in the gardens.

"I was lucky though," recalled Harry. "I was sentenced before the Japanese sergeant-major."

He remembered vividly what happened to two comrades who stole some food at their first camp near Hong Kong, where he stayed until September, 1943.

"They were tied to a gate post with only shirts on, in the freezing weather. They remained there for 36 hours. One of them died."

Harry believes Niigata was considered one of the worst prison camps in Japan. They had little clothing that winter. For three weeks his feet didn't dry in the slushy, near-freezing weather. He contracted pneumonia.

The only news they had of the war at first was from Japanese-English newspapers. Then they quit when the Japs started losing the war.

"They published Roosevelt's death, however," continued Harry. "It was good news to them."

"Then we knew something was breaking when they gave us three and five days' holiday. Then we heard a peace conference was in the offing."

Bringing his thoughts back home, Harry remarked that Winnipeg still looked like a bright, clean city.

With the family he sat down to a steak reunion dinner.