Nagasaki Prefecture Governor Nagano Wakamatsu and other local representatives met an advance party of the US Sixth Army in early September 1945 and agreed to cooperate in the release of prisoners-of-war and other preparations for the Allied Occupation, expected to begin before the end of the month. The view from the waterfront where the hospital ship USS Haven anchored was bleak: many buildings had been destroyed by fire and their black carcasses left to the mercy of the wind and rain; those still standing were invariably ramshackle and grime-laden. The streets were deserted except for a few stragglers in threadbare clothing and local residents trying to pick up the pieces of their lives and stave off starvation. Conspicuous by their absence were women and girls, most of whom had fled to the countryside assuming that the Allied forces would go on a rampage of rape and murder as soon as they landed. At night the entire city was shrouded in darkness because the electrical grid had still not been restored. Other essential facilities such as water and gas supply lines, hospitals, schools, transportation, banks, and government offices languished in a similar state of paralysis.

These scenes may have been appalling enough, but what the first party of Allied personnel could not see from their ship was the section of Nagasaki directly exposed to the wrath of the atomic bomb. The entire northern half of the city was so devastated that it was difficult to discern even the line of former streets. The remains of the Mitsubishi steelworks and arms factories marched up the Urakami valley, a silent tangle of iron frames twisted wildly out of shape. The carcasses of a few reinforced concrete buildings crouched in the wasteland as though battered with a gigantic hammer. Most of the corpses lying in the rubble or festering on riverbanks had been collected and cremated, but the stench of death and conflagration seemed permanently imprinted in the air. Homeless survivors were still sleeping in cave shelters or scavenging through the rubble for scraps of metal and other materials to build shacks. None knew the nature of the apocalyptic new weapon that had destroyed their city. Nor did they understand the impact of radiation, which was already starting to eat away at their bodies. Tallies taken at the end of the year would show that more than 150,000 people, or two-thirds of the
(mostly non-combatant) population of Nagasaki, had been killed or injured as a result of the explosion of a single bomb.

Warships carrying the Second Marine Division of the Sixth Army arrived in Nagasaki Harbour on 23 September 1945 and pulled up alongside Dejima Wharf, which only a few years earlier had bustled with the arrival and departure of the Nagasaki-Shanghai steamers. The Americans promptly requisitioned a large number of intact buildings to billet the hundreds of officers and soldiers coming ashore to occupy the city. The many Western-style buildings in the former foreign settlement of course provided ideal accommodation and were earmarked for requisition on the very day of landing. Mission school dormitories were converted into barracks for enlisted men, and the old customhouse on the waterfront was cleared of Japanese employees and converted into Occupation headquarters. (Fig. 12.1)

Figure 12.1. The Ōura waterfront street in October 1945, taken by Allied Occupation forces soon after landing in Nagasaki. The Holme, Ringer & Co. office, British Consulate and American Consulate are visible in the distance on the right. The buildings on the left are the ‘blindfold warehouses’ erected before the war to block the view of the Mitsubishi Nagasaki Shipyard. Streetcar service was still suspended because of the blackout continuing since the atomic bombing. (US National Archives)