CHAPTER ELEVEN

SOME ROYAL NAVY REFLECTIONS

Walter Miller

[Although some British personnel had been in Japan since September 1945, the main British component of the allied force for the occupation of Japan was held up and its arrival did not take place until March 1946. The first part of this article contains selections from the private diary of one who took part in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) for Japan. The second part offers some general reflections written from the perspective of 1990.

The diary sets out the experiences and views of a twenty-year old member of the Royal Navy contingent, employed in the BCOF garrison in Kure from April to September 1946. The diarist was a trained radio operator and was engaged in maintaining radio communications with British Commonwealth ships and bases. The diary was mainly a personal statement; and a great deal of the material of a peripheral nature has necessarily been omitted.]

Part I: Diary

13 April 1946

Arrived Kure and taken on board depot ship Glenearn. At present there seem to be dozens of ships in the harbour, and things seem pretty busy. The town itself and the docks seem to be very badly damaged by bombs and the dockyard buildings are just a mass of twisted girders. There is very little land suitable for cultivation, but what there is is cultivated to an amazingly high degree. Even the mountain sides are terraced and used for rice growing, as food is very short, and liable to get even worse in Japan now.

21 April

I decided to pay a visit to Hiroshima. This was the scene of the first atomic bomb, which practically destroyed and razed the place to the ground.
Caught the train from Kure. The railways, incidentally, are free to the occupation forces, and there are first-class carriages reserved for us, which is fortunate as the rest of the train is always hopelessly overcrowded... Some very beautiful countryside on the route...which passes along the shores of the Inland Sea. The waters of this sea are dotted with small islands, and there are lots of picturesque villages.

It is impossible to describe the town of Hiroshima, or what there is left of it, in any detail, but the damage is terrific. The population is living in small huts which have been recently erected, but there are piles of debris all over the place, and very few of the original buildings are still standing.

28 April

Everything going much the same as usual during the last week. Monotony relieved by a Japanese arms dump blowing up last night which fairly shook the place to its foundations.

2 May

Visit by the C in C, BPF [Commander in Chief, British Pacific Fleet], Admiral (Lord) Bruce Fraser, today.

5 May

Paid a visit to the island of Miyajima. The journey took about 2 hours by boat from Kure...passed some very fine scenery. The island has dozens of shrines and temples, some old pagodas and a holy mountain. Miyajima lived up to my expectations.

11 May

Paid a visit to Hiro, which is the main shopping centre for the area, and is about 5 miles from Kure... The road to Hiro is terrible, as are most of the roads down here, and it hasn’t been improved much by a recent flood which washed a large section of the embankment down onto it. At present it is covered with large rocks as a result of this, but we got through.

15 May

Trip round the islands of the Inland Sea today. Landed at Ondo town... smallpox on the islands. After cruising around for a while we passed several sunken Japanese ships with upperworks showing, including one