

Reign of Terror In NEI Worst Yet, Says Evacuee

A reign of terror surpassing anything inflicted by the worst elements of the Japanese Army was being endured by helpless natives and white people alike in the Dutch East Indies. Mr G. M. Rietdyk, a passenger on the Dutch evacuee ship, Tarakan, said this on his arrival in Brisbane today.

The Tarakan, carrying 169 men, women and children from Batavia and Sourabaya, was the first mercy ship to berth in Brisbane.

Mr Rietdyk, a former bank manager in Weltevreden, Batavia, interned for three years at deong.

He attributed much of the unrest in the Indies to the failure of the Allies to rush troops there in large numbers immediately after the Japanese capitulation.

The Japanese, he said, had trained a large Indonesian army which had taken full advantage of Allied tardiness. They were now being led by Communist agitators, carrying out a program of almost unbelievable brutality. It was unsafe for white or friendly coloured people to walk the streets of Batavia even in daylight.

"Goodness only knows what will happen when the few British troops now in the Indies leave in March as they are supposed to do," he said.

Food Deplorable

Mr Rietdyk said he did not think the British Commander-in-Chief in Java (General Christison) had been forceful enough in his dealings with the extremists. He thought the position would improve with the arrival of Lord Clarendon Kerr.

He described the food situation in the Indies as deplorable. It was news to him that Dutch food supplies were being held up by certain elements in Australia, but if so was the case a grave mistake was being made.

Shortage of food was a double-edged sword, striking at friends and foes alike in the Indies.

Mr Rietdyk will spend two weeks in Brisbane before going to Melbourne where his daughter is married to a Dutch naval officer.

The Tarakan's medical officer (Dr J. A. Mazel) said that two cases of mumps and four of measles occurred during the voyage which began on January 26 from Batavia.

"All of these people," he said

"are undernourished. They look much better now than they did when they first came aboard, but it will be many months before they recover from the terrible privations they have suffered."

Dr Mazel said the situation in the Indies called for the merciful intervention of the great Powers.

"There is no justice in the present situation, only misery and lawlessness," he declared.

The evacuees will be camped at

Wacol. Forty of them will remain in Brisbane for a few days and then go to their homes in Holland.

Tragic Child Mortality

One of the most tragic aspects of the internment was the number of children who died. In her camp six or seven died a day, said Mrs J. A. A. Essink.

From March, 1943, until peace, starch was the staple diet of the internees.

Mrs Essink, who with her six-year-old daughter Adele, was in a prison camp in Sourabaya for four years, said there was a terrible amount of starvation. They existed mainly on starch.

Everything they ate was mixed with starch.

The starch was eaten like cornflour, with boiling water poured on it. They had only water to drink. Towards the end there was a shortage of wood and the starch could not even be cooked.

Mrs Essink said the women worked like horses ploughing and digging in the fields, but they were not actually ill-treated. At her particular camp the Japanese were quite good to the children.

No Medical Gear

Although she was a nursing sister, Sister A. C. Van Domselaar was able to do very little to help the internees, as they were supplied with no medical equipment whatsoever. The most the Japanese ever gave them was a Japanese aspirin.

For dysentery patients they toasted the ordinary black bread.

Most of the deaths were from beri beri, and most of the children in the camp died, said Sister Van Domselaar. They made their own coffins for these people.

All the women had their allotted tasks and Sister Van Domselaar had to build bamboo huts in the camp.

Hanny and Emmy Wastenaar, aged five and three, were badly swollen with beri beri after three years in an internment camp. Although they looked quite well their little bodies were full of beri beri and it will be a long time before they are completely cured.

The children's mother said that all the mothers in the camp had had to work so hard in the fields and elsewhere that many of them had now practically lost control of their children.

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Her children had had to be left to their own devices while she was out doing such things as digging holes and ploughing fields.

There were several happy scenes on the wharf when young children met fathers whom they had not seen for anything up to four years. One little boy was four weeks old when his father left after war broke out in the Pacific.