

Victor's Justice: Colonel Victor Delnore and the U.S. Occupation of Nagasaki

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The Occupation years following World War Two were difficult times for most residents of Nagasaki, as they attempted to pick up the pieces of what remained of their lives after the atomic bombing of the city. The task was complicated by the fact that this had to be achieved under the watchful eye of American military officials. From the American point of view, there was considerable trepidation concerning possible civil unrest in the city, in light of the tens of thousands of civilians who had perished in the atomic blast that ended the war. What was desperately needed was the appointment of a commander of the U.S. Occupational Forces in Nagasaki who had the administrative and diplomatic skills, as well as the personal resolve, to supervise the orderly reconstruction of the town. Fortunately for both parties, such an official was found in the person of Colonel Victor E. Delnore.

The son of Lebanese parents who emigrated to the United States when he was only two years old, Victor Delnore cherished democracy and the ideals associated with it. More than anything else, he championed freedom and respect for the individual. He attempted to bring this philosophy to the task at hand—to help lead Nagasaki back from atomic destruction to economic recovery and democratic self-rule. Few Americans remember his contributions, and as the years race by, the number of Nagasaki residents who recall his efforts have also dwindled. As we look back over the past fifty years and reexamine the impact of the atomic bomb dropped by an American air crew on Nagasaki, it also seems fitting to recall the role played by a 32-year old Lebanese-American Lieutenant Colonel in the vital post-war years of 1946 to 1949.

Victor was born in Kingston, Jamaica on June 27, 1914, the fifth child of Melhem and Nozly Abd el Nour (later Delnore), who had come to the island around the turn of the century. Melhem had chosen Jamaica because it was within the British empire and meant that the family did not need passports to travel there. In May 1916 the Delnors moved to the United States because German submarine activity in the Caribbean had created a food shortage in Jamaica. Entering at Ellis Island in New York, the family later settled at Worcester, Massachusetts. In 1932, just prior to Victor's eighteenth birthday, Melhem became a naturalized citizen of the United States, thus allowing Victor citizenship as well.

In August 1940 Victor was called up to active duty in the Army and sent to Fort Benning, Georgia for training. The following month Catherine Abd al Maseh, his longtime girlfriend from across the street in Worcester, came to join him and they were married on September 10.

After assignments to the 2nd and 13th Armored Divisions, Delnore took command of the 46th Tank Battalion of the 13th Armored Division. He later led the 46th in campaigns through the Rhineland and Bavaria.

As a tank unit commander in Europe, Delnore sometimes found himself at odds with the tactics of General George Patton. Delnore ignored Patton's orders to shoot up towns as he went through Europe, because of the likelihood of deaths to women and children. At the end of the war, he also helped return captured Italians back to their homes from Austria so they could reunite with their families. In addition, Delnore released German women to local German officials instead of putting them in concentration camps alongside men.

These acts grew out of the fact that Delnore himself was an immigrant, and he loved and respected the ideals of freedom and democracy in the United States. He hated to see Americans deny these same rights to others. Delnore always sought to treat people with respect and dignity. It was a philosophy that would serve him well in both wartime Europe and Occupied Japan.

In July 1945 Delnore was sent back to the United States and given one month to prepare for the planned invasion of Japan. While in California waiting to be sent to Japan, atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the war came to a sudden end. Though most of the people in the Army decided to leave the service immediately, Delnore remained. Three years earlier he had applied for training to become an administrator of occupied territories after the war, but had been denied because of the lack of a college degree. Now with many of the university-trained administrators opting for early discharges, Delnore decided once again to apply. This time he was accepted and sent to Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania for administrative training.

While at Carlisle, Delnore met Col. R.E. Coughlin, who was on leave from Japan and would soon assume command of the Kyushu Military Government Region in Fukuoka. Nagasaki was administered as a subunit of the Kyushu MGR, and Coughlin asked Delnore if he would like to take command of the Nagasaki Military Government Team. Delnore agreed to take the assignment, even though he had been warned by Coughlin that it would be a difficult task, considering the resentment of the citizens toward the dropping of the atomic bomb by Americans.

Lt. Col. Victor Delnore left the United States on August 29, 1946 and took command in Nagasaki on September 23. By the time of his arrival in Nagasaki, the city had been under U.S occupation for exactly one year. His assumption of command marked the transition from regular military operations to civilian affairs rule. The Civilian Affairs Section had played only a minimal role in the first year of the occupation, but suddenly it moved to the forefront and military operations were transferred to Sasebo. Delnore set up headquarters for his Nagasaki Military Government Team in a three-story building at Shindaiku-machi no. 164.

When Delnore arrived in Nagasaki, there was very little organization in place. For the first month he did nothing but observe and assess the situation there. At the end of the month, he told those working beneath him that they had thirty days to get things done or they would be shipped out. One of the first orders he gave involved the confiscation of vehicles. There were only about ten vehicles in the entire prefecture, and most of these were being used as personal cars by U.S. Army officers. Delnore gave a few to Japanese government officials in Nagasaki and took the remainder for the NMGT.

Another early problem Delnore had to confront was venereal disease among his men. Upon assuming command in Nagasaki, he discovered that four of his men had acquired the disease from the same Japanese woman. He immediately ordered all of his soldiers to get instruction in using condoms and set aside a small hut where they could pick up the condoms free of charge, twenty-four hours a day, without anyone else knowing. Through these measures he practically eliminated venereal disease among his men, with only one case in three years. This gave the NMGT the lowest venereal disease rate in Japan.

Across the street and set back some distance from NMGT headquarters was the main camp for the American occupation authorities at Katafuchi-machi. Delnore allowed his men to choose the name of the camp, and somewhat to his chagrin they voted for the name Camp Patton after the

famous tank commander. Included in the camp compound were barracks, dining facilities, and a small chapel. Delnore created a sign at the entrance of the complex which read, "The Eyes of the World Are Upon You!—Be Neat, Be Proud, Be Soldierly, Behave, Be American." It became so popular that it later spread to other camps in Japan. Private residences for officers and their families included confiscated buildings at Atago, Minamiyamate, Kaminishiyama, Nakayama and Nakagawa. Delnore's personal residence was at Atago-machi no. 368, overlooking the road to Mogi. Other officers lived in the old Western mansions at Minamiyamate.

Of the thirty-five to fifty personnel under Delnore at any given time in Nagasaki, two in particular proved to be valuable assets in helping to administer Nagasaki—Winfield Niblo and Joe Goldsby. Education chief Niblo came to Nagasaki only three weeks prior to Delnore, while Goldsby had been one of the first Americans in the city, arriving in September 1945 as an engineer with the 5th Amphibious Corps Military Government Staff. Goldsby later served as chief of the Commerce and Industry Section and the Economics Section. He took his discharge from the Army in Nagasaki in 1947 at the rank of Captain, and remained in the city as an Army Civilian worker. At different times, he and his wife lived in both the Glover and Alt houses at Minamiyamate. Delnore refers to Niblo as the most capable and best-liked man who served under him in Nagasaki. The highly visible chief of the Education Section is also probably the best-remembered American from the Occupation period.

The Nagasaki Military Government Team underwent some changes during Delnore's three years in command, but generally it consisted of himself in charge, assisted by an Executive Officer and an Adjutant. Below this level were the heads of the various sections, which included: Economics, Civil Education, Public Health, Public Welfare, Legal and Government, and Civil Information. A Troop Commander oversaw the soldiers in the compound. At the lowest levels were various soldiers and clerks. Quarterly reports had to be submitted to the regional headquarters in Fukuoka by each Section head. As commanding officer, Delnore also wrote a short monthly Basic Report for the NMGT.

An examination of the quarterly Political and Governmental Activities Report ending September 1947 gives some indication of the matters that concerned Occupation authorities. Section One deals with Japanese government administration. Information was gathered on: 1) the establishment of the Labor Standard Office, which kept watch over labor conditions in factories, mines and workshops; 2) an extraordinary session of the Nagasaki City Assembly; 3) the number of Japanese who had resigned or been purged from public office; and 4) the operations of the Nagasaki Prefectural Government. Section Two is an examination of the activities of political parties. Section Three reports that there were no major violations of SCAP directives. Section Four concerns a wide range of activities covered under the heading Public Safety. This includes reports on: 1) black market activities ("Blackmarket activities in staple foods have declined considerably....However, black-marketing in miscellaneous commodities [has] increased."); 2) illegal entry ("on the decrease...."); 3) police education ("...continued to maintain lecture classes on the constitution, democracy and sanitation."); 4) traffic ("The 'walk on your left' campaign is in full swing [by Japanese police] at present and violators of the rule are being rounded up in trucks and taken to the police station where they are fined and given a severe warning."); 5) fires ("...many fires broke out throughout the Ken. The largest one was at Yasakamachi, Nagasaki City which gutted six houses."); 6) explosion (none); 7) pre-trial confinement of Japanese (none); and 8) the relationship between Japanese

and Occupation Forces ("[The] relationship between Occupation Forces and the Japanese remained good. Number of offenses committed by the Japanese against the Occupation Forces number 16 cases. Offenses committed by the Occupation Forces against the Japanese 2 cases.").

Official U.S. records describe the relationship between the American Occupation Forces and the native residents of Nagasaki as good, and Delnore agrees with the assessment. He says that in general he trusted the Japanese and they trusted him in return. Delnore relates how he was the only U.S. Army officer who did not keep a guard around his house, and how it was the only American residence not vandalized.

Delnore remembers the time that his tie flew out of his jeep as he traveled through the city, and how it was returned to him a few days later cleaned and pressed. He attributes this general goodwill to his policy of encouraging respect of the Japanese. His personnel were under orders never to utter the insult "Jap," and he punished all incidents of rudeness that came to his attention. Delnore also tried to eliminate the impression of preferential treatment for Occupation Forces. This led on one occasion to a scolding of his wife for allowing the local train to be held up on her behalf.

The generally good relationship between the American Occupation Forces and the residents of Nagasaki does not mean, however, that there were no problems. The very nature of the association contained some elements of inherent tension. Black market rice activities were a major source of tension between hungry residents and Occupation officials. The largest raid directed against such activities was a joint effort by Japanese police and American Occupation Forces that resulted in the arrest of a number of Korean residents who were selling rice illegally out of local restaurants. There were also a number of assault cases on both sides, in a manner reminiscent of the samurai/foreign sailor clashes of the early treaty port days.

Incidents precipitated by U.S. Occupation Forces generally involved various combinations of drinking, sex and poor driving. Delnore had to discipline and reassign soldiers on at least two different occasions: one for rape and assault, the other for being photographed in compromising situations by Japanese police. Two fatal traffic accidents brought on by the negligence of American soldiers also strained relations. In one, a newly arrived soldier disobeyed Delnore's ban on jeep driving during one's first month in Nagasaki, killing one Japanese girl and badly injuring another when the jeep was struck by a train. In a second accident, a truck driven by a soldier killed a Japanese man. Members of the NMGT visited the family to express their regrets and to offer some money in compensation.

The problem of U.S. Occupation Forces in Nagasaki could have escalated even further if not for efforts to keep the soldiers busy and entertained. An examination of the training schedule of soldiers for

November 1948 shows that they participated in daily calisthenics and drills. They also had Tuesday evening lectures on current events, Saturday evening talks on health and disease, and athletic events Tuesday through Friday afternoons. Dances were held on a weekly basis and movies shown four nights a week. A well-stocked Officers' Club was also open every night.

Prior to Delnore's arrival in Nagasaki, a local woman named Kogano Tomiko had opened Takarazuka Dance Hall in Hamanomachi for the Occupation Forces. The dance hall was in operation less than two months after the first American troops landed in September 1945. It closed

down when most of the military personnel transferred to Sasebo in 1946. For a time, Kogano remained in Nagasaki and continued to bring some of her girls to the camp to teach social dancing. The former Takarazuka dancer was extremely popular among the Occupation Forces, and was considered a woman of class and integrity by Delnore. She later moved to Sasebo and Kumamoto where she operated a series of clubs for American servicemen. In her later years she purchased the old Western-style house at Higashiyamate no. 16 and moved it next to Glover's Garden on Minamiyamate, where she ran it as a private museum of Western artifacts. The author had the great pleasure to interview her on two separate occasions prior to her death in late 1993.

With the dance hall in Nagasaki closed down, Delnore requested permission to bring in Japanese dance bands to entertain his troops. Although permission was originally denied, he later was allowed to bring in the likes of the nine-piece Nishimura Gyoho Band and the Fuji Novelty Tango Band. Delnore hoped that the entertainment would help divert his soldiers from the inherent dangers of boredom in an occupied city far from home.

During his three years in Nagasaki, Delnore experienced a number of interesting happenings and met a variety of distinguished visitors. Delnore's participation in a labor-management dispute produced one of his finest moments, as he was able to diffuse a potentially volatile situation. Upon orders from SCAP, he allowed communist labor leaders from the shipping and coal mining industries to hold a rally on the third floor of the NMGT headquarters. After permitting labor and management to scream at one another for a while, Delnore went upstairs and openly chastised the two sides for selfishly thinking of their own needs instead of putting the good of the country first. He then (contrary to SCAP orders) had the Japanese flag unfurled and saluted it. Delnore at this time ordered both parties to take a break; afterwards they returned and discussed areas of cooperation. After the incident, according to Delnore, there was little communist agitation in Nagasaki.

Sometimes the Japanese came to Delnore for resolution of a problem. One such occasion startled Delnore and greatly embarrassed his interpreter,

who was a local Japanese clergy. An older Japanese woman accompanied by seven young prostitutes walked into his office one day complaining about the high Japanese taxes they were forced to pay. The spokeswoman said they had complaints in two areas. First, they wondered why they had to pay taxes for the days of their menstrual cycle when they could not work. Second, they queried why they had to pay an "entertainment" tax when the work was not "entertaining" for them. Delnore said he would do what he could, but made no promises. Later, at a chance meeting with a high Japanese official from the Finance Ministry, he mentioned the complaint. Soon afterwards, the tax breaks were granted and the women came back to Delnore's office with flowers and free brothel passes as tokens of their appreciation. Delnore, through the blushing clergyman, accepted the flowers, but politely declined the passes.

On other occasions, Delnore celebrated the signing of the New Constitution with local Japanese officials, helped welcome the Emperor to town, and witnessed the ceremony of Higashi Honganji Buddhist monks from Kyoto who performed rites over the ashes of thousands of unidentified atomic bomb victims. Visiting dignitaries he had the opportunity to meet included Father Flanagan of Boys Town (who was in town to open a similar facility in Nagasaki) and Helen Keller (who brought her private railroad car to Nagasaki and spoke to large crowds for two weeks).

The young American Lieutenant Colonel dealt with a number of local Japanese officials who were

generally much older than he was. He recalls these relationships fondly, and has kind words for those with whom he worked so closely. Governor Sugiyama Sojiro is remembered by Delnore as a supporter of Occupation policies. Delnore says Sugiyama and his wife were like grandparents to everyone. The Sugiyamas gave Victor and Catherine Delnore a lovely Japanese screen, which still graces their living room wall.

Delnore did not know Sugiyama's successor, Nishioka Takejiro, well, but received a letter of thanks from him for contributing \$50 to the newly constructed Kokusai Bunka Kaikan. He donated the money in the name of his daughter Patricia (now an English professor at the University of Delaware) who was born in 1948 in Fukuoka. Patricia, the first child born in Japan to NMGT personnel, was baptized by Bishop Paul Aijiro Yamaguchi in December 1948 at Oura Cathedral.

Delnore also respected Judge Ishida Hisashi, whom he considered a fine man of great intelligence. Ishida was the father of Ishida Masako, the little girl who gained fame as the author of the banned book *Masako taorezu*. The first-hand account of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki was banned by SCAP officials in Tokyo, even though Delnore supported its publication. As a matter of fact, Delnore still has a copy of the book autographed by both father and daughter.

From all indications, most Japanese respected Delnore as well. Prior to his departure in April 1949, he received a number of farewell tributes, and the street below his house at Atago-machi was renamed Delnore Road. For years after his return to the United States, many Nagasaki residents corresponded with him, but Delnore fears that most of his old friends have long since passed away.

Governor Sugiyama petitioned for Delnore to remain as Occupation commander, but without success. In his farewell message, he noted the "many seeds...sown by Colonel Delnore in various fields. These seeds have already come up. It is now the time for us to take care of these sprouts for satisfactory growth."

Mochizuki Shoshichi, the chairman of the Nagasaki City Council, thanked Delnore for assisting with the democratization of politics." Commenting on the fact that the Japanese expected harsher treatment from their occupiers, Mochizuki said that Delnore was a good teacher "whose guidance we have been willing to follow with pleasure, and this, I believe, is due to your noble character and your love of humanity."

In response to a request from the Prefectural Assembly for a message for posterity, Delnore provided the following: "Adversity is but a challenge—Rebuild!" After his departure the words were supposedly cast in bronze and affixed over the main doorway of the Assembly.

The final tribute is in the words of Judge Ishida, President of the Nagasaki District Court, who spoke on behalf of local government officials.

To be deprived of such a magnanimous, kind, and awe-inspiring mentor is very hard to bear; we are loath to bid you adieu. I have been told that in Hiroshima, they have coined an expression, 'No more Hiroshima[s],' but I don't like it. We should like to cry out, 'Peace from our Nagasaki.' We are endlessly grateful to you for having laid a firm foundation and for having shown us the way to peace at its initial stage. May you [now] go back to your homeland with full assurance that we will follow you in the footpath to peace which you have laid for us.

Judge Ishida then concluded his remarks with a story of having seen Col. and Mrs. Delnore leave

Oura Cathedral after baptismal services for their baby, Patricia.

Right then and there I said to myself, 'Surely, the Commanding Officer, Colonel Delnore, is one of us—a Nagasakiite! And that darling babe of his belongs to Nagasaki!' Quite involuntarily, I prayed for dear Patricia's prosperity and happiness. Colonel Delnore, after you have returned home, and when your dear child has grown up, I should like to have you tell her: 'Nagasaki is our home, where our sweet memories still linger on; That is our dear old town, where you were baptized, you know. And when we were about to leave Nagasaki, both the Government officials and the citizens over the length and breadth of Nagasaki Ken gathered together, and gave us a grand farewell meeting true-heartedly and whole-heartedly. Right there, one of the Government officials started talking about you. He said that you are a Nagasaki baby. What do you think of that!' [You will] tell her that won't you, Colonel Delnore?

In spite of the circumstances in which these words were written—officials of an occupied city paying tribute to the departing occupying commander—one cannot help but feel the human bond between two fathers doing their utmost to ensure that the world would become a better place to live for their daughters.

The Delnors left Nagasaki for the United States on April 2, 1949. A second daughter, Cathy, was born to Catherine and Victor in 1951. Victor completed his college degree after years of taking night classes, and later received a Masters degree from the University of Maryland. After retiring from the service in October 1969, he and his family settled down in Boylston, Massachusetts. From 1969 to 1984 Victor taught Government and History at Middlesex Community College in Bedford—twice earning “Teacher of the Year” awards. From 1984 to the present he has performed volunteer work at the Worcester V.A. clinic in the daytime, while teaching evenings at Assumption College in nearby Worcester.

Victor Delnore's body has been slowed somewhat recently by bouts of Parkinson's disease and cancer, but his mind still recalls events from almost fifty years ago in Nagasaki as if they happened only yesterday. The Lebanese immigrant embodies the best that America has to offer. He is also a Nagasakiite, and his memories of the city do, indeed, linger on.

See *Victor's War* by Victor Delnore.

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