

Memories of Days Past 過ぎし日の思い出

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War. A fight where countries bleed. The unforgiving obliteration of innocent lives. I pray for a serene world that will never see such tragedy again. In this essay I will write about the reality that I encountered during my time in the army, so please treat it as an individual account but it would make me happy if you can share my opinion. To all the departed souls of these times, I respectfully dedicate my deepest condolences.

These are my memories from the happenings of 65 years ago. In Kuramoto-cho, Tokushima-shi where today the Tokushima University Hospital and the Central Prefectural Hospital are located, the central 62nd division of the army was stationed. Additionally there were training facilities of the self-defense forces and the army. I was assigned to the Central Communications Division. At the time the army had a military station in the south, on top of Mount Bizan, with an observation post (which had a non-commissioned officer and several stationary soldiers and a heavy machine gun) to protect close by civilians. In June, 1945, a communications network between that station and the central troops was established.

One time the telephones stopped working so I was ordered to do the repairs. I led one

assistant soldier and took the required tools and materials. I went to the guard house of the main gate of my division and showed my written mission command to the guard. As I was about to leave the base “Mr. A”, a fellow neighbor was there, too. After I got my mission approved by the guard, I talked to Mr. A for a little while about the latest affairs, the importance of our duty and our personal experiences. We wished each other well and encouraged each other for our missions, before I set off to Mt. Bizan to fix the telephone lines. I can still clearly remember his gallant salute when we parted. I stayed in contact with the headquarters on my way. When I arrived I showed my command to the officer in charge and commenced my work. The reason for the broken phones was a loose screw in the transmitting device. I was able to reestablish communications with the main base.

A few minutes later, the soldier on watch spotted an airplane in the north over the Sanuki mountain range. “It’s a B29 bomber!” We immediately contacted headquarters while a thunderous noise was roaring. There are no words for that. A few minutes later we heard two large explosions. I hid in the thicket of the bamboo grass with the other soldiers for a little while. When we dared to poke our heads out to see what happened, we saw black smoke rising from the airforce base and sand was whirling up all the way to the top of the mountain. The other soldiers looked at each other and said: “The base is

all gone. Is this the end?"

After about twenty minutes the smoke slowly cleared and the barracks faintly appeared. We couldn't establish a phone line to the headquarters. It was because it suffered severe damage. The commanding officer ordered two soldiers on an emergency mission to the bombed base. We went down with them. The area around the base was in turmoil and crowded with people from the neighborhood, fire fighters, the police and rescuers. The garments storehouse, the offices, the military hospital and the officer's barracks and the guardhouses of the head offices were damaged. There was a one metre wide ditch along the north side of the base (nowadays west of the Kuramoto police ward, along the street of the fire station) where trees were planted surrounding the base. Inside the premises were also various pine trees and bushes to give shade. From where nowadays the entrance area of the central hospital is to Emon (衛門), the trees in the base, and especially the pine trees, had their branches blown off. On these branches were fragments of burned uniforms, body parts of dead soldiers and dangling skin scattered around. I lowered my head and was filled with unexplainable emotions.

On that day a bomb exploded in front of the facility of the defense forces. The blast hit the barracks directly. Including the commander all soldiers present died. Among them was Mr. A. When I heard of his unfortunate death, I was lost for words. I could only try

to grasp at what happened that moment. I thought, if he had been stationed at a different facility he could have escaped his unfortunate destiny. I was struck with sadness. That was just about a little more than one hour after we talked. If only we had talked a little longer. It is a pity.

Now that the times have changed and we have transitioned from Showa to Heisei the barracks and training facilities for soldiers have disappeared and been replaced with such great buildings like the Tokushima Central Hospital and the Tokushima University Hospital. Where there were once ditches and holes are now streets. There are public offices, great parks and playgrounds. In spring the cherry blossoms bloom on Mt. Bizan. The front gate of the old main military base used to be where today the main entrance to Tokushima's University Hospital is. On the right of the entrance used to be the guardroom of the station where everyone who went in and out of the premises was checked in order to protect the whole base. I think that the soldiers that passed away are still there to protect everyone who passes by.