

The Great Air Raid as Seen From Afar by a Seven Year Old Child

7歳児が遠くから見た徳島大空襲

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Since Tokushima City has been searching for accounts of the attack, they asked for my memory of what a rural child saw on that far off day as a record. The Great Tokushima Air Raid of July 4th, 1945 took place just after I turned seven.

My home was in Itanishi-cho (present day Itano-cho) on the northernmost side of Suita, at the point where the Koutokusen line, Route 1, and the Osaka River Valley come together. It was built on a good spot facing the road, at an elevation of 30 metres with a clear view from the south east to the south west.

Because I was a child, my memory of those days isn't very clear, but at the time it seemed like formations of B-29s would go flying from the south west over the top of Mt. Takao on almost every clear day. Four big white planes leaving behind vapor trails was a common sight. At that time, it wasn't being reported that there were air raids in the Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe area, so we weren't really afraid yet.

In elementary school, we were told by our teacher to bring in the soot from our pots and kettles. Scraping it together, we drew pictures of trees and shrubs on the walls of the

auditorium and the food storage building for camouflage. These pictures remained for a long time even after the war.

At the time, the air raid sirens went off almost every day, so as an air defense my home's light bulbs were all aimed straight down. On top of that, we covered them with things like *furoshiki*, so the light wouldn't leak outside in the middle of the night.¹

On the day of the Great Tokushima Air Raid, my uncle (really a cousin of my mother) who lived in Nishinomiya had just come to visit. We were 22 to 25 kilometers away from Tokushima Station as the crow flies, but my uncle noticed anyway, maybe because he was so familiar with air raids. I was woken up in the middle of the night. Standing on the embankment in front of our house we could clearly see the firebombs falling over a wider and wider area when we looked toward Bizan. Below, I remember everything was red with flames. The planes flew so low in the sky that they appeared dyed red with the reflections.

In this way, the firebombs were dropped many, many times. Because I was still a child watching the attack from far away, I wasn't very frightened. Perhaps because the air raids weren't covered by the newspapers and radio, I feel like they hadn't been discussed much in our neighborhood. I do remember people who had fled gathering outside our

¹ Furoshiki (風呂敷) is a type of traditional cloth wrapping that was frequently used to transport clothes, gifts and other goods.

house in the night.

Throughout the air raid, a lot of ashen burnt paper fell. The adults said it was burnt *fusuma* paper from the air raid on Takamatsu.² At the time, only people who saw the damage knew the true extent, on account of reporting restrictions. I only found out about the pictures taken from Mt.Bizan directly after the Tokushima Air Raid decades later (maybe because I was working outside the prefecture).

Four years passed before I first returned to Tokushima after the war, and black buildings still remained in front of the station. While I didn't experience the attack directly, having later learned about many tragedies in places like Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Tokyo, and Okinawa, the image of the victims shuddering in terror with no place to flee, looking up from the ocean floor as the B-29's, like white bellied man eating sharks, demanded blood in a feeding frenzy on the blood stained ocean surface is imprinted in my mind.

The day the Allied Forces came to Tokushima (November 2nd), I didn't understand what was happening at the time. In front of our house the road stretching to the Osaka-area ran parallel with the Osaka River Valley, with nothing in the way to obstruct the view. I watched outside with my bamboo spear capable grandmother as a two hundred meter long line of jeeps and canvas covered trucks crossed the Osaka mountain

² Fusuma (襖) are vertical rectangular panels which can slide from side to side to redefine spaces within a room. They are traditionally 90cm wide and 180cm tall.

pass from Takamatsu and simultaneously stopped for a break.

Because our house faced the road, I could see this kind of thing. Still a child, I was able to watch without fear. My older sisters might have been at school, so they don't seem to remember.