

Devastation and Evacuation 戦災と疎開**Tsutsui Toyosuke 筒井 豊祐****Hachiman-cho, Tokushima-shi 徳島市八万町**

On June 26th, 1945, the air raid sirens sounded during our afternoon classes. I was a fifth grader in elementary school. Our classes were stopped. Students who lived near the school were sent home immediately. Those who lived further away were to be brought to the school's bomb shelter when the alarms went off. The sirens blared as I headed home. I put on my air raid hood and went into the bomb shelter in our backyard. It was humid inside the shelter.

The familiar sound of the explosions from the B-29s came closer and closer. Then suddenly, all was quiet. In an instant, there was a thud and the shelter was lifted off the ground with the fearsome force of the earth below shaking. The shelter rattled from its ceiling down to the ground. My grandma and the five of us children held our breath and were numb with fear. When it was quiet, we went outside to take a cautious peek. Even though it was midday, all around us was dark. Black smoke was rising and reaching up to the sky right in front of us.

The bombing of Sumiyoshijima, some two hundred metres south-east of us, had smashed all the windows in our house. The fragments of shattered glass pierced

countless holes in the walls and beams inside our house.

After a while my mother came home from work at Suketo Elementary School. She checked the bomb shelter. Just as she was saying “*tadaima*” (“I’m home”) to see if anyone was there, the sound of bombs falling to the north-west came. It was the sound of bombs falling on Suketo Elementary School, five hundred meters north-west of where we were. Later, a colleague of my mother’s visited. Tears streamed down the teacher’s face. The teacher told my mother that “the bomb fell right on the shelter we always use at the school. The kids and teachers inside were all killed.” The teacher had come to our house fearing that my mother had suffered the same fate.

Once my mother had safely seen the school children home, she went into the school bomb shelter as the air raid alarm sounded. When she heard the sounds of the bombs falling towards our house, however, she went home to see if we were okay. She was worried about our elderly grandmother and about us. We were just children between the ages of one and eleven. Somehow she managed to survive and make it home.

I can still see my mother’s colleague taking my mother’s hand and telling her that the school had been bombed and that the children and staff had been killed.

The air raid siren changed to a caution signal. I went to look around the ruins of where the bombs had fallen with my friends from the neighbourhood. The houses had

been smashed to pieces and blown away. The water from the underground pipes beneath the gardens was gushing out. A hole the shape of a flower pot had opened up. It must have been fifty meters in diameter. You could really feel the power of the explosion. On the top of the broken houses near Suketo Elementary School, dead bodies had been sent flying by the explosion and were caught on the roofs. They were brought down using rakes made from wire hooks attached to bamboo poles.

I never really understood the way in which people die. The misery of it all. It was barely real, like some dream. I watched, dead to all feelings. What would have happened to the five of us in the chaos after the war if that fate had befallen our mother?

The air raids carried out by the B-29 bombers were devastating not just to the big urban areas. On June 22nd, Akita-machi was hit and then Sumiyoshi and Suketo followed on the 26th.

Needing to be relocated, we had to go to my paternal grandfather's home town, Nyuta-son in Myozai-gun. The village of Nyuta was sixteen kilometres away in the mountains near the source of the Akui River. We piled all of our clothes, futons, luggage and drawers like a mountain into a cart. My father pulled it and my brother and I helped push it from behind.

We arrived at our relative's house and dropped our things off. While my father

returned the cart he had borrowed, my brother and I stayed with our relatives. The night was chaotic. I woke up and went outside to look at Tokushima city to the east. The sky was coloured a deep red.

The B-29s moved in formation calmly overhead. You could see the reflections of the blazes below on the planes as they passed in their low altitude approach. The incendiary bombs fell with sounds like heavy rain. You could also easily see the fires rising up. I remembered the bombings before and hoped that the people would get out alive. Before long, the dawn came. But with the clouds of black smoke enveloping the whole sky, it was a dark red sun that rose. I had never seen anything like that before. Once it got brighter, refugees from the city started walking along the dusty road in little groups after being evacuated from the city.

I thought my family would have arrived by the afternoon. On my way to go and find them, they arrived. I saw the rest of my family pushing bicycles and baby carriages. They were all safe.

The groups of refugees had continued on -their meandering path with tired, heavy legs that entire day. I heard about the Tokushima air raid and fires in the city from my parents. I had watched it from afar all night. I can't imagine how horrible the experience was.

“Everything was burned to the ground,” my father said.

“There were so many people killed and injured when they tried to put the fires out.

The bombs landed right on top of them.” said my mother.

As he tried to evacuate from our house, my father realised he had left an *ihai* behind at our family altar. This is a Buddhist memorial tablet. He had to separate from the rest of the family when he went back to get it. Our family headed for the banks of the Yoshino River and fled. Everyone ran to the reclaimed land at Kayabara beside Tokushima Engineering College and the banks of the Yoshino River. Hidden with a futon above the air raid hoods, you could see the incendiary bombs falling on the houses before your eyes and the huge, blazing fire engulfing everything in its path. Everyone was in mortal fear as the cracking sounds of the incendiary bombs surrounded their ears. It was so frightening that my five year old brother asked “Mom, can I die now?”

It truly was a miracle that we all made it through unscathed. We borrowed a room in our relative’s farm’s shed. That was our life as refugees.