

## **Experiencing the Great Tokushima Air Raid**

徳島大空襲での体験談

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During the Great Tokushima Air Raid a formation of B29 bombers filled the sky over Tokushima. In the space of two or three hours Tokushima city became a burnt field. The air raid sirens started when I was in the second half of my third year at Jogakko (all-girls school). As I had been appointed one of the evacuation leaders, when the air raid siren was issued I put my hood on and then ran to the first grade classroom to lead the first graders to the air raid shelter.

During one air raid a bomb was dropped just one hundred metres away, the earth shook violently and I felt weak at the knees, I instinctively covered my head, looking up to the sky I could see leaflets being scattered and dropped in bundles. We would wait for the situation to clear and then return to our regular classes.

My home was next to Okinosu and there was a four metre wide road that led to the city centre. Farmers grew rice and vegetables throughout the area.

On July 1<sup>st</sup> of the fourth year of Jogakko we were assigned to the munitions factory in Kami-Suketo once we had passed our health check. We were due to start work on July

4<sup>th</sup>. On the afternoon of July 3<sup>rd</sup> the air raid warning was raised. As soon as the siren went off I jumped up, changed my clothes and put on my hood. I evacuated to the air raid shelter in the garden with my mother and grandmother. We immediately noticed the sound of gunfire. When peeking from the bunker I could see the house brightly illuminated. The incendiary bombs had set the row of rice paddies in front a blaze. Flares dropped in unison made it look like midday. It didn't feel safe to stay in the air raid shelter. The three of us gathered under a tree in at the back of the field.

Members of the neighbourhood association directed us to escape along the banks of the Okinosu River. There was no road, we were just running through rice fields, it was disorientating. As fire bombs fell nearby I desperately held on to my grandmother's hand. With the encouragement of everyone we reached the riverbank. The bank was lined with small thick trees that were good for hiding in. It finally calmed down but I couldn't move as I was exhausted. I certainly wasn't prepared to jump in the river. The explosions and gunfire were coming our way. Eventually the planes flew away and the area became dark, I couldn't make out people's faces, I was pleased to be holding my grandmother's hand. "We are alive, just!"

Since people don't often go to the river bank there were many leeches and

snakes in the area. It was eerily quiet, the B29s could turn around and come back. The morning sun rose from the east, we were all crying as we walked home together. There were rows of houses on fire in places.

The head of the neighbourhood association announced to everyone that older people should be evacuated since the conflict had become so violent, the head of the neighbourhood association was transferred. My grandmother reluctantly went to live with her daughter-in-law in Handa-cho, Mima-gun, I sometimes went to check on her wellbeing as I was concerned about her. I was glad because they had plenty of food. On the train back to Tokushima we heard machinegun fire and the train stopped. We got out and lay face down in the rice fields. When the plane had gone the train started moving again. In this condition it couldn't quite make it to Tokushima Station.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> we were told to listen to the Emperor's radio broadcast announcing Japan's surrender and the end of the war, my grandmother and mother cried as they listened. I was relieved to think that there wouldn't be another air raid. After that we heard various information and daily anxiety followed.

I have no pleasant memories of my days as a student. It was a difficult and

shameful experience.