

Memories of the Tokushima Air Raid 徳島空襲体験談**Uono Tadahiro 魚野 幸弘****Tsuda Honmachi, Tokushima-shi 徳島市津田本町**

It was the middle of the night when the whizzing sounds of the falling incendiary bombs from the airplanes and the explosions started. That day, the neighbourhood association in Tori-cho, where I was born and raised, made the decision to evacuate. I was a second grader in Uchimachi Elementary School. Every night my family and I took shelter with relatives in Josanjima. But the first firebombs had fallen on Josanjima, so we all fled to the estuary of the Yoshino River. We cut through the sports ground of the old engineering college, which today is part of Tokushima University's Engineering Faculty. On the way there, we were under machine gun fire from low flying Grumann F6F Hellcat planes. The air raid was fully under way. We had to dive into paddy fields and cross stone bridges over the rivers. The bridges were about ten meters long and fifteen or sixteen centimeters wide. We made it to the Yoshino River trembling with fear. We were up to our waists in water with crowds of people when the morning came. As I looked towards central Tokushima I saw incendiary bombs falling like dazzling fireworks in the sky and the whole city ablaze. On the banks of the river, cows and horses were frantically stampeding from west to east. They formed a silhouette with the

blaze from the city in the background.

After dawn broke we tried to go back home. Our family had sold clocks from our house. But our home was completely burned down. Every single clock was burned black. But somehow some food that had been prepared the night before had survived. Once we scraped off the charred surface covering the white rice we managed to eat some rice balls for breakfast right there.

While all this was happening, my father had stayed behind to watch the house. When the air raid started, he grabbed the cash box and strapped it to his bike. He took off and jumped into the Fukushima River. He stayed there until the morning. Of course, no one could even think about stealing the cash box in the chaos. I was so happy when my father got back home and we were all together again.

On that day, the smoke turned the sky over the city the colour of weak tea. It was so smoky that you could look at the sun with your naked eye and the city reeked of the smell of burned bodies. Afterwards I heard that an entire family had been crushed to death in a well in their garden near City Hall. They had all jumped into the water in the well but when they jumped in on top of each other they had all been crushed to death. One of the people killed was the same age as me and went to my school.

Another child from my school had flesh from their hip sliced off from the shrapnel of

an incendiary bomb while running and trying to escape.

As we thanked the heavens over and over for our safety, we headed for my father's home town of Kawashima, over thirty kilometres away. With nothing in the way of transport available, we had to travel on foot with nothing but the clothes on our backs.

We happened upon a little fire station in Yamada-son. We borrowed it and started our new life there, six people to a six-tatami sized room using borrowed futons and things from neighbours and relatives. For the next two years, our staple food was sweet potato. It came to it that we would eat acorns and the vines from sweet potatoes. We would eat anything. With rationing, we were distributed a mere two cups of rice every ten days. That had to be divided between the six of us. When we divided it, we couldn't even boil two *shaku* of rice grains with our vegetables. (A *shaku* is an old measurement of volume equivalent to about eighteen millilitres.)

I am thankful that I can live a life free of poverty now. I think about it every day. As I pray that the people whose lives were stolen in the air raid can have peace in the next life, I hope in my heart that we can end war and the suffering and pain that it brings to so many people.