

My Memory of the Great Tokushima Air Raid

徳島大空襲の思い出

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On July 3rd, 1945, and for the four nights following, I remember the mosquitoes were especially bad. I was in my second year of junior high under the old system. Perhaps because they were starting to mobilize junior high students early to help the war effort, the exams normally taken in mid-August were starting, and we were taught to cover the lights with dark *furoshiki* in case of air raids.¹

It must have been past 10pm, when suddenly firebombs came falling crackling “*bari~,bari~*” to the east of my house, near Tokushima Station. I ran out of my house immediately, and heard that they were napalm bombs. Exploding high up in the sky, the fragments inside used to ignite the oil components looked like fireflies as they fell.

As we had practiced in fire drills, I tried to put out the fires by beating them with a cloth wrapped in a pre-soaked rag, but the fire fell back-to-back unceasingly. At that point my father told me, “Since I’m a public servant, I have to go to the Prefectural Office. I can’t very well evacuate to Shiroyama or to Mt. Bizan like a member of the

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

general population. You come with me.”

I followed my father without bothering to ask if attending to the office in the case of emergency was one of his official duties. At that time, the younger members of the office's staff had been conscripted, so maybe that responsibility had been left to those in their 30s and 40s. Because of the evacuation of women and children to the rural areas, I lived alone with my father at that time, and had no choice but to go with him.

Well we went to the Prefectural Office and although the outer walls weren't damaged, the glass windows were all destroyed, and a crimson blaze came out from one side reaching up towards the sky, as the documents and other flammable materials inside burned. At this, my father just watched the burning building dumbfounded, without approaching.

Finally, we found the office's air raid shelter (a cave dug from the earth in which to escape air raids and machine gun fire) dug into the plaza. We were able to get a place to sit. My father occasionally poked his head out and watched the building burning brightly. “What will we do if there's a direct hit on the shelter?” I asked. My father thought for a while, and answered “If that happens, we'll dive into the Shinmachi River”. I couldn't swim at the time, and told him that. “I can't either”, he replied. I realised it would be a double suicide. After midnight, it seemed like the worst was over. At dawn,

looking at the area getting lighter and lighter, I saw that even though what looked like large scale unexploded shells were scattered about, we had somehow escaped our double suicide.

Even when morning broke, it was still hard to see clearly. The centre of Tokushima City had burnt completely, and the ash was floating around on the air currents, blocking sunlight and darkening the sky over the city. The sun was deep red, almost as if it itself have been burnt.