

## **Sixty-five Years on from that Midsummer Nightmare**

真夏の悪夢から六十五年

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Now almost eighty percent of the current generation does not know what it was like to experience war or the Tokushima Great Air Raid – supplies are plentiful, transport and communication are convenient in the present day. Even when I talk to my grandchildren they do not seem to understand. At that time I had very little to eat, day in and day out, only farmers had rice to eat, I ate potatoes and weeds from the side of the road on a daily basis.

As I recall, in the early hours of July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1945, in excess of a hundred B29 bombers descended on Tokushima, seventy-five percent of the city was reduced to baked earth, it was a night of intense heat. Thousands died and hundreds of thousands were physically wounded or psychologically scarred. People were running with tears in their eyes, calling out to their immediate family. People ran to Mt. Bizan and into the Yoshino River and Shinmachi River to hide from the hail of incendiary bombs that were dropped without mercy. If that is not hell, I don't know what is! The next day, you could see Mt. Shiroyama from Nikenya Station. Nevertheless, I believed Japan would win the war

because it is the land of the gods (*shinkoku*), even if one hundred million fireballs fell on Japan, I would persevere with the war effort, loyalty and patriotism (*jinchuuhoukoku*), dogged perseverance (*kenninjikyuu*), we would endure and sacrifice until victorious. Unlike the current democratic society, there were strong relationships between neighbours which were full of affection. I remember it as a positive time during which I did not feel much stress.

The Asia-Pacific War had started with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1937, and lasted until Japan was defeated by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima, on August 6<sup>th</sup>, and Nagasaki, on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945. The honourable military personal that were sacrificed, the civil servants, the roughly three million people who died in the air raids, the suffering of the people I mentioned earlier, the sadness... Nowadays, when times are hard, I will recall the story of the war experience, we must never fight each other in war again. The four islands of Japan with their beautiful four seasons should be inherited in perpetuity forever.

While armed forces exist there is the chance of war and history repeating itself. In the world today we have examples like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and civil war in Mozambique. It is a very unfortunate situation. It is the job of politicians to create conditions where wars like this do not happen.

In the end, it is said that those who saw hell can pluck up the courage. Father, you were strong, the people of the Meiji and Taisho era were strong. Then, rising from the ruins, we were encouraged and heartened by Namiki Michiko's *Ringo no Uta* song and we stood up and broke sweat for the reconstruction of our homeland.<sup>1</sup> Japan today is in peace, without terror or war, people have freedom of speech and you can do whatever you want as long as it is not contrary to the public interest, events like the Great Depression happen once every hundred years, now we live in a prosperous and convenient age. We must be thankful and pray for the souls lost in the previous war and what they sacrificed in order for us to live life in peace.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ringo no Uta* (Song of the Apple) was featured in the movie *Soyokaze* and first released in January, 1946. It is considered the first post-war hit song. Namiki had lost her parents, elder brother and lover in the war. The song expressed feelings of freedom and sold over 100,000 copies. The song was written during wartime to promote a fighting spirit but did not pass censorship at the time as it was considered to be too soft. The movie and song were rewritten immediately after war defeat and contributed to the revival of post-war Japanese culture.