

The Bombing of Akita-machi 秋田町の爆撃

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June 22nd, 1945, "Air raid warning issued!" the air defence chief went around town with a megaphone to alert people.

Our elementary school (*kokumin gakko* – part of the education system in Japan between 1941 and 1947) was on alert so we had been sent home from school and were waiting there.

At the time I lived in Akita-machi, the groundwater was high, fifty centimetres from the ground, if you dug around groundwater had accumulated. The air raid shelters always flooded as they were partially underground, it was my role to help drain the water.

The puddles of water were shimmering white inside the dimly lit air raid shelter. My sister (who was two years younger) and I were wearing rubber boots when we heard a roar of airplanes overhead. We heard the roar of the B29 and four distinct shots, there was no particular sense of fear as planes frequently just flew over Tokushima without dropping bombs. I had been doing drainage work in the shelter; we followed the shadow of the airplanes from the doorway.

Now that I think about it, they were flying much lower than I had seen before, black round things fell. I thought they looked like pachinko balls or iron shot-puts.

I quickly pulled by neck back and cried to my sister “They are bombs!” I pressed my fingers over my eyes and ears and lay face down in the air raid shelter.

I don’t even know how many minutes later it was but my mother’s voice returned to us. It was pitch black so I couldn’t see anything. After a while it got brighter, I looked around at my surroundings vacantly. My mother was holding my two year old sister and I was staring at them. When I crawled out of the shelter I was covered in mud I felt “alive!”

My family consisted of my parents and five siblings but my two eldest siblings were students and had been mobilized and sent to another prefecture. My father was absent on business. While mother was changing our clothes she complained that she had just done the cleaning that morning but it was in vain.

My father came back after a while. The air raid alarm had already been lifted, our father took us to take refuge on Bizan along with our valuables. Although we met with schoolmates on their way to school along the way, I didn't understand the difference between their experiences and ours.

The area from Akita-machi 2-chome to 3-chome was destroyed. My house was set

back from the road, only the storm shutters (*amado*) were damaged. About two dozen people died in the explosion and more than two hundred were injured. An air defence chief who had been strict with us fell from a watch tower and lost his life.

The Great Tokushima Air Raid happened just ten days later, before dawn on July 4th, we spent the night in darkness, without lights and remained in the house. My mother had taken wood from a collapsed house nearby and was working on reinforcing the air raid shelter, our fear was growing. When I saw a doll through the gaps I thought it was a dead body.

We could not listen to the radio as we had no electricity during the night of the July 4th air raid, we had no information at all, I think it was past two o'clock when we took shelter on Mt. Bizan. The five members of my family were fortuitously reunited in the morning and none of us suffered any injuries, I couldn't believe it. The things that happened in those days should not be repeated again.