

The Great Tokushima Air Raid 徳島大空襲**Sato Akira 佐藤 昭-****Hachiman-cho, Tokushima-shi 徳島市八万町**

I clearly remember as many as five, 500 kilogram bombs exploding over the middle of Sakae-machi a few days before the air raid. I was at the Shinmachi Elementary School where I was a sixth grade student, when one day at around nine o'clock, I looked up and saw a formation of three B-29 fighters. They looked as if they were only thirty centimetres long, and left jet trails behind them. "They're flying low today" I thought, when suddenly glittery lights came out from the main bodies of the planes. I heard a "zaa~" sound overhead, like when you walk through a bamboo forest on a windy day. Right in front of the school was a large reservoir of water for fighting fires, so I dove in and lay face down. Dirt was coming out from the wall in clouds, and I couldn't see thirty centimetres in front of my face. I felt like I couldn't breathe.

My mother came running, yelling "Akira, Akira". I replied "Here! Here! I'm over here!" while waving my hands. Joining hands we fled from Takajo-machi straight toward Oomichi (main street), even though I was barefoot.

On Oomichi around 2-chome or 3-chome, the store fronts were all glass, but the shockwave had blown out all the windows, making it hard to walk. There was no way to

get through barefoot, so I wrapped my feet in my kimono sash and walked slowly. Thinking that we'd be able to make it through if we went to the Vaisravana (*Bishamonten-san*, one of the four heavenly kings of Buddhist teaching) we passed through the main temple gate, and I was able to use the water there to wash my hands and face, and have a drink.

After that, again being led by the hand I walked to the Inbe Shrine. Looking out behind it, thick, billowing clouds of smoke were rising from what I thought must be Akita-machi. Seeing this, I realized that even if we returned home, it might be burning. Hungry, with the mosquitoes coming out, I waited for an hour or so.

Next, we walked through Oomichi, Nakachuo, and Sakae-machi. The bombs had left behind six or seven metre wide craters, and everything was either leaning over or had been swept away.

When I returned home, my uncle was in the midst of frantically looking for our remains. Tears flowed, and everyone said "thank god, thank god" because we were home safe. However, a great number of the neighbourhood association had passed away. "K"'s mother had received a throat injury from shrapnel, and the blood wouldn't stop gushing. As "K" held her close, the mother gasped "water, water". She fed her water from a cracked tea bowl two or three times, but it was no use.

That woman had been extremely afraid of air raids, but was also extremely smart. So, she had bought a bucket and dug her own one meter deep air raid shelter. If she had gotten in, it would have saved her life, but she had lost the power to enter it in the end. That was the most tragic part.

My family owned a number of houses for rental purposes, but of those only one had a roof left, and even that one had had its bottom blown out. The Young People's Association (*seinendan*) put up storm shutters (*amado*) around the house for us, so we were able to live there. Things were tough though, because we had no food.

There were some rice paddies in Hachiman-cho, and some of the rice collected annually as a tax was kept there, but it was trapped under fallen houses and mud had gotten mixed in. We took that muddy rice, put it in bottles, and poked it with bamboo until it became white.

Finally, the day of the Great Tokushima Air Raid came, and I never thought we would be hit with such a direct fire bomb attack. The air raid siren sounded as usual, so eating our dinner, we made for the shelter. Onigiri (a rice ball) and a cumber with plum vinegar on top would be my last meal in that place.

We waited inside the mosquito net in the shelter for a number of hours, until oil started to pour from the sky like rain. Just as I thought “this is bad”, the first wave of

attacks came. The B-29's made a roaring sound (“*go~*”) low in the sky. Inside the shelter, covering my eyes and nose, I sat facing the bucket. Two or three rounds of fire bombs came screaming down (“*pin pin*”). As if surrounded by sparklers, our house's tatami mat room caught fire. “K” said “My mother will be burned again! I'm going to get the bones and bring them back here”, but everyone said “Don't go! We can dig the bones up again later” and we were able to stop her.

Eventually the heat died down, and we fled toward the mountain. However, two story house on Chuo-dori was on fire, which made it impossible to pass, so we ran in the direction of Takajo-machi. On the way we saw many crumbling houses. Because of the heat and our thirst, we asked for water at Okinohama. Following the railroad south, I stopped to use the bathroom at Hachiman Elementary School, and received onigiri and pickled daikon radish (*konko* in the local dialect) from the members of the National Defence Women's Association (Kokubo fujin-kai).

After that we headed for the upper area of Hachiman, and were happy to finally walk on something other than paved roads. Leaving Ichihara, we went to the bridge over the Sonose River and met with many other people who were fleeing with just the clothes on their backs.

After that we went to mother's neighbourhood, where because my brothers had

arrived safely, we were able to relax, wash ourselves with cold water, and put on clean clothes. Drowsiness followed shortly, and I slept soundly. When night fell, the fireflies chirped and frogs croaked.

Later, my mother and I went for a walk again, but the asphalt was all broken up, and not fit for walking. More than anything, my mother was worried about food. When we went back to our old house, the tatami was still hot and she burnt her feet badly.

Since there was no medicine, there was nothing to do but cool them somehow. Taking stock of the situation, I went to get ice from the ice company near what today is Tomidabashi (Tomida Bridge), since it was just piled up outside. While cooling my mother's feet, we returned to Hachiman. The rice was entirely burned, so we couldn't eat it. The Great Tokushima Air Raid was a defining point in the 78 years of my life.