

The Unforgettable Tokushima Air Raid Experience

忘れ得ぬ徳島市空襲体験

Fukushima Keiichi 福島 計一

Nakayoshino-cho, Tokushima-shi 徳島市中吉野町

My father had died of an illness the previous autumn so in order to feed our family of four I wanted to live in good health with a strong heart. In spring 1945, my uncle came from Kobe to shop for food in Tokushima. He recommended that we evacuate because with a post office and a telephone station Tokushima was sure to become a target of the air raids.

From April, air raid warnings were issued every day and night. At my workplace we had to be on guard regardless of the time. At night I went to bed fully clothed with my leg gaiters (*geetoru*) wrapped. I contracted acute pneumonia and was bedridden because of overwork and malnutrition. From June 26th I was confined to complete bed rest. On the night of July 1st, after spitting dark black blood, my fever decreased.

On the night of the 3rd the air raid warning was issued, incendiary bombs were dropped and the house started to burn. I let my younger brother and sister evacuate, taking our father's Buddhist mortuary tablet (*ihai*) and some parched rice (*yakigome*) along with them. If I had remained sleeping I think I would have been burnt to death. I

held onto my mother from our house to the road but there was a sea of fire in all directions. We began to follow the flow of people towards Mt. Bizan while we heard incendiary bombs fall from the sky (“*zaa~*”). As I headed towards the mountain somebody backtracking bumped into me, I fainted and fell to the ground. I regained consciousness when I was splashed with water. I was taken to the air raid shelter at Jochi-ji, it was already full of people. I had to be helped in as I was so sick.

Before long, the main hall of the temple was hit. The tiles from the roof could be heard rattling (“*gara, gara*”) and falling. Between the main hall of temple and the air raid shelter was a big Japanese Aralia tree and the hardwood shutters of the shelter were doused in water, this saved us from the fire. We persevered while choking on the smoke, it became brighter outside, the shutters were opened and we left the bunker. Towards my house nothing could be seen. A pharmacy storehouse remained next-door. Sometime passed, it was so hot that there was heat haze visible from the roof tiles, the chemicals inside were ignited by the hot air and exploded with a roar.

We were worried about the safety of my siblings on Bizan. The air was still hot so we dipped our feet in water tanks wherever possible. There were three dead bodies on the roadside. Some were uninjured, some had burnt hair, others gasped at thin air.

I met my siblings at Kasuga Shrine, they were confirmed safe.

From there we headed towards Sako Station in order to meet relatives living in Yaso-cho. “Oh, you are alive!?” I heard many of my senior co-workers (*senpai*) exclaim when they saw me. Wearing my *yukata* sleepwear and cloth slippers I felt like myself again.

That night there were false rumours of another air raid, we placed our possessions on a two-wheeled cart together with those of our relatives in Yaso-cho and headed through the night to Nyuta-cho with no particular destination in mind. We spent the night camping under a big tree. The dawn was damp with dew.

Although we were complete strangers and there were many of us we managed to find a family to stay with, we didn't have plates or bowls of our own, we stayed with that very kind family for four months. My illness improved and I managed to commute for one hour to Kokufu-cho on foot. I will never forget the help I received. Despite getting a mild fever from commuting to work in the rain without an umbrella I avoided contracting tuberculosis and have lived in good health until now.

An aunt of my relatives was burnt to death by a fire bomb, it could have been my mother. On July 27th a bomb hit the main gate of the Kuramoto barracks. My boss survived as he had changed his shift but one of my acquaintances was wounded. I

believe life and death come down to fate.