

**To Experience the Great Tokushima Air Raid 徳島大空襲を体験して****Yamagami Toshiko 山上 敏子****Kokufu-cho, Tokushima 徳島市国府町**

As we mark the milestone of sixty-five years since that tragic air raid, when you look back at that time, my husband and I lived in Sako 4-chome (currently Niban-cho) renting the back tatami room. At that time my husband had been called-up for the second time. He had been working at the headquarters for six months. He also had to travel a lot outside of the prefecture, I went to Sako Station to see him off, and when the alarm sounded I didn't know what to do because the alarms were not always accurate.

On the night of July 3<sup>rd</sup> I had been talking with two of my husband's friends. Back then we didn't have any sweets (*okashi*) so I made steamed bread in aluminium lunch boxes served with tea. At that time, the time the warning alarm was sounded, our friend's had returned home, we turned off the electricity and covered the light with black cloth to make the room dark, quickly the air raid siren came, my husband changed into his military uniform with a long sword, I wore my air defence hood and took my emergency bag, I hurried to the air raid shelter. At that time, flares were dropped with a roar (“*pari~pari~*”), it immediately became brighter than daytime, one after another B29s dropped incendiary bombs from a low altitude, amidst the explosions, I didn't feel

like we were going to survive. The B29s turned as they passed by, when we looked out of the shelter, the house next to the plate fence also started burning with a “*pari~ pari~*” sound. Although we poured many buckets of water and had prepared the timber for the event of fire we decided it was no use fighting it and fled to safety.

I clenched my husband’s sword desperately, through the explosion, hearing the wailing voices, I barely made it out of the house, I ran like crazy through the gloom of the rice fields, I collapsed and stumbled many times on rocks, injuring my hands, feet and face. When I arrived north of Sako Station only about thirty women, children and elderly people had gathered there to evacuate. At that time young men were rarely seen due to conscription so it was a relief for them to finally see my husband in military uniform. Then came a roar from the east, my husband shouted "Get down in a line along the ridges!" and when he shouted that loudly that’s what I and everyone else did.

Incendiary bombs were dropped from a low altitude as tens of B29s flew overhead. Some fell in fields with a thud (“*dosun dosun*”), causing the earth to shake and clouds of dust, others were extinguished as they fell in ponds with a “*shon shon*” sound while two houses directly opposite were burnt down.

The planes circled many times to drop more bombs, we continued to lie down and look up at the sky, the bombing went on for two and a half hours without stopping, then

finally several dozen aircraft flew away over the eastern sky at dawn, we could only see them off paralysed with fear. When I looked towards the city centre it had become a sea of fire, the dawn sky was a bright burnt red.

In an anxious state, I was looking for a friend as I was unsure of her safety. My husband headed to the headquarters, so I decided to be taken into the care of my husband's home, I walked to Kokufu-cho.

On the way, I sat in the main prefectural road by Kamona Junior High School, took out a mirror from my emergency bag and wiped my face, hands and feet, and fixed my hair, a lot of the people whose houses were burnt down were loaded into two trucks, I waved them off as they headed out west along the road. Along the road I recall the red oleander flowers that were in bloom.

Sixty-five years from that day, fewer and fewer people know about the war and the air raid, I really feel the passing of time. I experienced a lot, I really think that war should not happen again. With only sadness and without anything positive, I think that it would be foolish. We should not forget the people who have been lost their lives, I just pray that this peaceful era which followed lasts forever.

The red oleander flowers at the side of the road remind me of escaping from the heat of a sea of fire.