

Experiencing the Air Raid in Tokushima

徳島における空襲での体験

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This year it is exactly sixty-five years since the Great Tokushima Air Raid. At the time, I was working as an air defence patrolman on top of Mt. Bizan (where the pagoda now stands). When I was on sentry duty I often saw formations of B29 bombers flying over the Kii Channel on their way to the Hanshin region (Osaka and Kobe). At 5pm on the evening of July 3rd, eight men went to get supplies as usual (firewood, drinking water etc.) each carried a backpack and climbed up from Tenjin Shrine. It was 6pm before we got to the top. After resting we relieved another group. It was about to get dark and I was observing the city during the blackout. Around 9pm, in the direction of Takamatsu, B29 bombers began dropping incendiary bombs, the sky was dyed a bright red.

From what I remember, at 11:40pm around forty planes invaded from the east and the first fires rose from Tokushima Station towards Dekijima. Then, from the outskirts of the city dozens of aircrafts could be seen along with fire and explosions that scorched the sky, soon the city could not be seen at all. Then the fuselages of the B29s were

stained red from the crimson flames and I could see the outlines of the plane crew. Many people were evacuated to Mosukegahara (an area on top of Mt. Bizan). Therein I saw someone with burns to their entire body, they were being carried on a door panel by their family, he was about the same age as me and he was crying out, it was painful to see. Eventually, they made their way to the military hospital (now the Central Hospital in Kuramoto-cho). I think the air raid lasted about three hours. Smoke shrouded the entire city so I could hardly see anything.

As the sun rose in the eastern sky it became brighter. A large number of people had been killed by a direct hit as they tried to make their way up Mt. Bizan. The area beneath Tenjin Shrine had not stopped burning so we could not go down so I made my way to Shiinomiya Shrine and finally found a way to the burnt town. I walked through Minami Sako to reach the Shinmachi area. There were countless charred corpses in the vicinity and I could not tell if they were men or women, they gave off a terrible smell. Shinmachi Bridge had also been burnt down and only the reinforced concrete girders remained. From the spaces between the girders dark river water could be seen flowing by. I may have been wearing *jika-tabi* (socks outdoor footwear modelled on *tabi*) but it was hard to walk due to the heat of the asphalt. We could only see the Marushin Department Store, Ichiraku-ya Store, the Prefectural Government Building etc. in the

ruin but, otherwise, you could see all the way to the sea at Okinosu. A member of the Women's Association was in front of Eagle Gate (*Washi no Mon*) and I was given two rice balls to eat. I ate them as I hadn't eaten anything since the night before so I now remember them being delicious.

Modern Japan is built on the debt of the war dead, it must absolutely not happen again. I hope that the peace that we currently enjoy lasts forever.