

I will never forget that July 4th when I was Twenty Years Old

忘れない二十才の七月四日

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On July 3rd, 1945, I was doing volunteer work at a bank. On that day when I finished work and was about to head home, my superior walked us to the backdoor and said: “Tokushima might get attacked tonight. When that happens go to the highest spot, wear your favourite clothes and don’t bring heavy luggage. I pray that we can meet again tomorrow.” On my way home a co-worker told me: “Yesterday Takamatsu was attacked, better be careful.”

It happened after I got home, while I was doing the house work for the night: I covered the lights, made sure no light shone through the cracks to the outside and prepared soldier’s comfort bags like my two older brothers in the war and the women’s group asked me to.

The air raid sirens went off, again. I turned off all the lights, dressed up and went into the garden in front of our house. Plenty of pine trees and little shrubs were growing in the garden. Between the bushes we had built a seven square metre air raid shelter, where we put in all the raw necessities for life. But I thought “If I ever actually have to use

this, it is over for Japan.”

My mum and I checked the water buckets around the shelter. There was a well nearby and our house was surrounded by trees so there was no hazard of catching fire from buildings around us. I also thought that we would be able to extinguish little fires by ourselves.

The night grew darker and while the air raid sirens were ringing, the first formation of ten or so B29 bombers came flying in from the direction of Takamatsu. Flares were dropped on the three streets from Sako Ichiban-cho to Kuramoto. It looked like the white lines that are drawn on a football field.

There were also houses that caught fire from the flares. I stared in blank amazement at the trees in our garden that looked like modern illuminations crackling under the flames. After a little bit I heard people in the streets making a commotion and I started feeling the impending danger. I took my four year old niece that we were taking care of on my back, grabbed some valuables and followed the flow of people evacuating. From Yasoguchi we crossed Saya Bridge and walked towards darkness and the banks of the Yoshino River. People that were bleeding from their heads were already sitting on the roadside, some were crying loudly while others ran around yelling the names of their friends and family members. It truly looked like hell on earth.

When we arrived at the river bank I looked towards Sako and every place between Ichiban-cho and Goban-cho was bright aflame and even the sky was red. The B29 bombers had been coming in and repetitively dropped incendiary bombs. At that point they used the light of the burning city to drop their bombs on the houses that were still remaining. During that time there was no resistance from the Japanese military, neither in the air nor on land.

When the sun rose the alarm was lifted and I looked from an elevated spot towards our house. I was able to see all the streets from Ichiban-cho to Goban-cho. All that was left was one storehouse and the chimney of a miso store.

That was the beginning of our hard and arduous life without a home.

After the bombing I didn't know what happened to the people of my neighbourhood association. I didn't know until later that eight of our neighbours had died. One person who was looking out from a ginkgo tree was hit directly and died immediately, a family of four died after staying in their air raid shelter and another three were too late in escaping and burned to death.

During wars there are too many tragedies for them all to be told. I am praying that a day will come when the word "war" does not exist anymore in this world.