

The Great Air Raid as Seen by a Five Year Old Girl

5才の少女が見た大空襲

Sakamoto Yuko 坂本 裕子

Ishii-cho, Ishii 石井町石井

I am seventy years old now, and I think I am the youngest person to experience the war. I believe I have to pass on my story of the Tokushima Air Raid to the next generation. For a small five year old girl, that hellish war was a big, big experience, one that I definitely won't forget for the rest of my life.

At the time, sixty-five years ago, my house lay east of the city centre in Okinosu-cho. The eastern half of our neighbourhood had many farms, while sprawling estates with splendid gardens lined the western half. Even amongst those, our house was a bit different from the rest of the neighbourhood with its western style courtyard. In my early memories, my teacher father and family of seven carried on a peaceful life. However, it all changed in the early dawn of the hot summer's day of July 4th, 1945.

While we slept with the curtain still draped over the electric lamps, the air raid siren sounded, echoing. We all jumped to our feet, and covering our heads with our air raid hoods, entered the air raid shelter in the backyard. I held my breath inside the cramped, pitch black space. After a while, I heard the all clear siren, and enjoyed a moment of

relief. Suddenly, a ghastly roar came rushing toward us from the east. My fourteen year old brother screamed “It's a B-29, flying low”. Abruptly, a “*ba-baan*” sound rang out overhead. My brother yelled out again “Flares are dropping!”, and low in the night sky the great black wings of a B-29 went flying over head toward the west. Before long the rumble of I don't know how many dozens of B-29s came approaching from the eastern sky, one after another. The whole sky shook with their roars.

My father closed the hatch of the shelter. At that moment, I could hear the sound of “*za-za*” blasting and then violent explosions going “*gaan gaan*” successively from the direction of my house. The sound of shots [*bari-bari*] bursting and the crashes of the explosions pierced my ears. After a while my father heaved open the hatch, and looked outside. His face was deep red, illuminated by the flames of our blazing house. “The house is burning! It's dangerous to stay here! Run!” he said, and my family left the shelter.

Our house was crimson amidst the flames. The sky was a tempest of explosions, the “*zaza*” bursts of the firebombs continued without pause.

My father beat down the hedge of the neighbouring house, and we ran to the road.

My oldest brother, holding our one year old sister, my eleven year old brother, my seven year old sister, and I all went running after our father, mute, panicked with fear. A

tremendous number of bombers came flying in overhead, producing a roar of detonations like a swelling tide. The rain of firebombs poured down, tracing out lines of flame. Not knowing when the bombs would fall from above, with my small heart of five years on the verge of splitting, I wandered amidst a hell of fear and panic.

A large part of the city, having been attacked by a countless number of those giant ominous birds, was left helpless against the raging fires. 120,000 people tasted absolute terror under those flames, running about trying to flee. After continuing for a long time, the B-29s disappeared, but the city was burning up. My family headed toward our home, full of dread. I thought the whole neighbourhood might have been burnt down. Arriving near my house, I was astonished to find that almost all the houses had been spared from the fire. It seemed that the B-52s had dropped firebombs just here and there on houses in Okinosu-cho. Of those, our house was one.

The next day, with no house, no clothes, and no food, our family of seven had been pushed to rock bottom. For my parents, post-war life was a series of consecutive hardships.

My only prayer is that these, the lowest deeds of man, and such a foolish, cruel war may never be repeated.