

## **The Great Tokushima Air Raid 徳島大空襲**

**Hirano Akihiko 平野明彦**

**Showa-cho, Tokushima-shi 徳島市昭和町**

Our home was beautiful. At the foot of Fukushima Bridge by the Fukushima Police Box and a few doors down from the Ito Fire Station, the town was pleasant. Our house was on the riverside. The Fukushima River was full of shrimp, crabs, fish and oysters and across on the other bank it was lined with pine trees.

That all changed in one instant. It is the fourth of July. Just as I am lying down to sleep, the air raid sirens blare and all the lights go out. After a while, it stops. It is such a relief. But just as I get back in to bed, the sirens blare again and tell us that the air raid is underway. This time it will not stop wailing. The day before, people had been conscripted to work digging and reinforcing tunnels in the hills heading to Kuwano and making weapons. I was exhausted from the work. I spent all the allowance money I had on three boxes of bayberries and left them by the door so we could eat them the following day.

I quickly change clothes and strain my ears to listen to the sounds outside. I hear a bizarre noise coming from the darkness. It is a low but heavy booming sound. The night

sky is turning red and there are white clouds of smoke rising. The flames rise steadily from Tokushima-honcho all along the Fukushima River. Blazes of crimson are rapidly approaching our house. The incendiary bombs are falling like rain. There is a bomb shelter buried on the side of the road. The children and the elderly are taking refuge inside but it is too dangerous. Everyone is instructed to get out and run for Okinosu. I have recently been asked to be a leader by the neighbourhood association. I am just a third grader in the old Tokushima Junior High school but there are hardly any adults around. So many have been conscripted. The river water is blasted out by an incendiary bomb. It is just a wall of spraying water now.

The flames are rising in our town and the blaze has spread from our neighbour's house to ours. My father and I help with the carrying of water buckets. We put out some fires but the blaze is too strong. We can't put them out so we give up and take off. I look back to see the electricity cable attached to our house turn red. It melts and falls down. Somehow I remember that. We crawl on the tatami mats cutting through an eight mat room. The mosquito net is up. In the alcove, my brother's service sword is left there. He is gone to war and wounded. Above our heads the white smoke is closing in. I reach out and feel my way across the room. I grab the sword and we escape. There is a bomb shelter dug beneath our porch. There is a big bag left there in case of evacuation. I take

it and throw it into the Fukushima. The current takes it and it is burned up. All I have left are my senses. Everything around is now a sea of flames. We run to the rice granary owned by “A”. Nearby, incendiary bombs break through roofs and explode. We are covered head to toe in oil. As our hoods burn we try to take them off but the power of the explosions bounds us tight. We can’t escape. We can’t get out. Breaking out and heading out the door, we run for our lives. Out on the street everything is aflame. Incendiary bombs whiz down from the sky. We zigzag left and right and escape. Amid a furious storm of bullets, we burst into a cigarette shop on the corner. On the floor, there is a wagon full of household things piled up on top of it ready to be taken. There is no one there. We borrow a futon. My father and I cover our heads with it and run for the banks of the Yoshino River. The all out air raid goes on. We spend the night stuck to a stone wall like lizards under Sumiyoshi Bridge. There are people trying to escape along the raised ridges between the rice fields engulfed in flames. They are lit up in red as the unceasing machine gun fire comes down. As the sky is hidden by the sheer number of bombs falling, the paddy field is stabbed by falling sheets of iron. The scene before us is an utter nightmare.

At last the air raid is over. A faint dawn breaks and we look around us. All is scorched earth. Just after noon we stand before the ruins of our burned down home. We

can't stop crying. We fear the worst when we hear no news of my mother and sister. We were all reunited that evening. We were overwhelmed with tears of joy.

Now I am seventy-nine and enjoying every day.