

The Great Tokushima Air Raid 徳島大空襲

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Living in Chiba Prefecture 千葉県在住

I was living in Minami Shinmachi with my parents and three siblings at the time. I was a fourth-year student at Shinmachi National School (*Shinmachi Kokumin Gakkou*), and my little sister was born in the autumn of 1944 and so was still only a baby.

In Akitamachi and outside of the city there had been small bombings leading up to the air raid, but they were all basically just a way for the American military to use up its excess bombs. It was midday when the bombs fell on Akitamachi (as well as Takajo-machi). We hid in our storehouse until the noise and tremors died down, exiting to find black smoke in the sky and bomb fragments stuck in our fence and trash bin.

The alarm was sounded several times after that and we would get our things together and run up Mt. Bizan (always to Tenjin), only to come back down later without anything happening.

And then the day finally came.

Possibly because it was so late at night, this time we didn't hear any alarm and run up Tenjin. We were asleep. The sound and light this time, though, was on a scale different from usual. Across from the post office (in Nishi Shinmachi, where the economic center

is now) the sky was already lit up by fire. Soon the Shiroyama and Akitamachi areas followed, leaving Uchimachi and Shinmachi surrounded in three directions by fire. My family was thrown into a panic, totally disorganised.

We all hurried out of the house together, and since Tenjin appeared to be on fire we headed for Zuigan Temple. Along the way, the firebombs started landing in front of us. If you looked up you could see B29s flying just overhead, lit red from the fire. I felt like I could even make out the faces of the American soldiers.

I brought my little sister's futon and spent the night at a tiny shrine (*hokora*) at Zuigan Temple with my father. My mother and little brothers must have gone somewhere else. A lot of people were hiding at the tengu pine tree, but the bombs started falling almost like they were aiming for the tree. Several landed in the cemetery just in front of me. Bizan was lit up by the flares like it was midday, and the forest shook audibly in the powerful wind as it did during typhoons. The houses of Iga-cho were aflame, the fire growing stronger in the wind, the whoosh of the firebombs' descent heard in the background. The whole town was on fire, nothing but flames, the heat, the roar. My legs frozen with fear, I was stuck there with that baby futon covering me, unable to move until the B29s left.

When morning finally came, we went up to Shin-Shikoku Road and walked around

looking for my mother and brothers. We went as far as the bronze Emperor Jinmu statue and came all the way back to Zuigan Temple, where we just happened to run into them on their way back from up the mountain. Apparently they'd escaped by crawling around the mountain diagonally, away from any mountain trails.

Shinmachi Kindergarten had managed to survive the flames, so a lot of the injured were carried in. It had basically become a field hospital.

A truck came to the foot of the mountain and started handing out rice balls, but I was still dazed and my head hurt and I had no appetite anyway. Thinking back on it now, my parents must have been in an even worse daze than me, having lost everything.

We decided we would go try to stay with distant relatives and set off on foot, still wearing the same clothes.

We chose to walk along wide streets like in Nakano-cho, and in addition to the summer heat the sides of the streets were still hot with the remains of the fire. There were burnt pieces of firebombs left sticking out here and there.

The smoke still hadn't cleared. I'll never forget the eerie sight of the sun up in that black sky.