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One Man's Justice

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By Mark Ealey and Yoshimura Akira

Mark Ealey translates and Introduces Yoshimura Akira's novel probing the moral equation underlying the Pacific War in a novel that explores American firebombing of Japanese cities and the Japanese revenge killing of U.S. POWs.

Throughout history, acts of hypocrisy have come easily to the world's Great Powers. In 1938, in reaction to Japan's "barbarous" bombing of Chinese civilians, the United States placed a "moral embargo" on the supply of planes and aviation equipment to Japan. One year later, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the following appeal:

The President of the United States to the Governments of France, Germany, Italy, Poland and His Britannic Majesty, September 1, 1939

The ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centers of population during the course of the hostilities which have raged in various quarters of the earth during the past few years, which has resulted in the maiming and in the death of thousands of defenseless men, women, and children, has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and woman, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.

If resort is had to this form of inhuman barbarism during the period of the tragic conflagration with which the world is now confronted, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings who have no responsibility for, and who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities which have now broken out, will lose their lives. I am therefore addressing this urgent appeal to every government which may be engaged in hostilities publicly to affirm its determination that its armed forces shall in no event, and under no circumstances, undertake the bombardment from the air of civilian populations or of unfortified cities, upon the understanding that these same rules of warfare will be scrupulously observed by all of their opponents. I request an immediate reply.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

For a number of years thereafter, the United States did indeed refrain from targeting civilian populations in its bombing campaigns against the Axis powers. Less than seven years later, however, at a time when Roosevelt was still president, American strategic bombing was taking a toll on German and particularly Japanese civilians in numbers previously unknown in the history of warfare. With the firebombing of Japanese cities in the spring and summer of 1945, and culminating in the dropping of the atomic bombs, the hypocrisy of the "moral embargo" was exposed as clearly as in the fiction of "The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" espoused by the American foe, Japan. By the summer of 1945, bombing civilians had become so routine that three days after the destruction of Hiroshima tens of thousands more people were incinerated in Nagasaki, and the last mass bombing raid on the already shattered city of Tokyo occurred just hours before Japan's surrender on August 15. In seven short years, the American interpretation of the bombing of civilian targets had conveniently changed from branding it as

an act of "inhuman barbarism" to making it the centerpiece of the American way of war and a strategic imperative that would dominate all future wars.

We know from horrific images and records of atrocities at Nanking that Japanese inhumanity towards the Chinese people was often delivered with the bayonet and the sword. By contrast, the American fliers in their B-29 Superfortresses were comfortably distanced from their victims, sowing death from thousands of feet up in the sky. In the fire-bombing of 64 Japanese cities in the spring and summer of 1945, each mission comprised hundreds of B-29s loaded with clusters of napalm-filled incendiaries to set houses alight and anti-personnel fragmentation bombs designed to deter those who rushed to fight the fires.

International readers have been treated to ample description of Japanese war atrocities in histories, novels and films, but rarely have they encountered the depiction of U.S. military acts such as the terror bombing of civilians or other illegal acts. Yoshimura offers precisely this perspective.

After Japan's surrender, the commander of the U.S. 20th Air Force, General Curtis LeMay, was quoted as saying: "Killing Japanese didn't bother me very much at that time... I suppose if I had lost the war, I would have been tried as a war criminal. Fortunately, we were on the winning side." As LeMay suggests, the concept of criminality in war was firmly embedded in the equation of victory and defeat, or as the Japanese saying goes: kateba kangun, makereba zokugun ("The acts of the victorious army are justified, but those of the defeated are condemned.")

Of course, none of the victors faced charges in the Tokyo War Crime Trials. However, in the final days of the war, acts of vengeance were committed against captured bomber crews. A total of 16 captured American pilots and crew members were brutally killed in Fukuoka in August 1945, some by vivisection in a new phase of the murderous experiments carried out earlier in China in biowarfare Unit 731. Ten more American POWs were killed in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6 and one who escaped into the streets from the shattered ruins of the Hiroshima Military Police Headquarters is said to have been beaten to death by an angry mob as his countrymen in the Enola Gay, mission accomplished, headed back to their base at Tinian.

Two works of literature stand out in addressing the killing of American POWs in Fukuoka. Endo Shusaku deals with the dehumanizing of those involved in the vivisection of downed American fliers in his book "The Sea and Poison," and Yoshimura Akira recalls the executions of bomber crewmembers in his thought-provoking examination of the logic of war crimes, "One Man's Justice." Yoshimura is a prolific writer in the "technohistory" and documentary-style fiction genre and many of his works focus upon the experiences of the people of Japan in the Pacific War. He writes not to justify, but to inform, seeking to remind readers of the existence of another perspective.

New Zealander Mark Ealey is a freelance translator specializing in Japan's foreign relations. One Man's Justice was his second of six book-length translations, following on from Yoshimura Akira's Shipwrecks *(1996.) Here is a portion of Chapter 3 of* One Man's Justice *describing the last two days of the war from the point of view of fictional character Kiyohara Takuya, one of the executioners of the captured bomber crewmen.* Written for Japan Focus and posted on November 30, 2005.

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At 11:31 P.M. on June 15, 1944, a report came in to Western Command Headquarters from the electronic detection post on Cheju Island that

unidentified aircraft were progressing eastward. Forty-five minutes later, reports were received that the aircraft had crossed the line between Izuhara on Tsushima Island and the island of Fukue in the Gotoh Archipelago, and had then crossed the line between Izuhara and Hirado in western Kyushu, meaning that the aircraft were traveling at around four hundred kilometers an hour. At first it was thought that they might be Japanese spotter planes, but none were capable of flying at that speed, and as no friendly aircraft had been reported taking that flight path, it was judged that this intrusion must represent a force of enemy heavy bombers heading for the northern Kyushu area. The tactical operations center reacted by immediately contacting the Nineteenth Air Force Division and the Western Region anti-aircraft batteries on special hotlines, and Takuya, as duty officer, in the commander's name issued a full air-raid alert for the northern Kyushu area.

Forty-seven aircraft attacked Kokura and Yawata that night, but they met with such determined resistance from fighters that the bombing they did manage before heading back to China was virtually ineffective. Seven American bombers were shot down during the attack.

Those at Western Command Headquarters had assumed that the intruders were B-17s, but inspections of wreckage of aircraft shot down near the town of Orio in Fukuoka Prefecture and Takasu in Wakamatsu City determined that the planes had in fact been the latest American strike bomber, the B-29 Superfortress. A crew member's own film of B-29s during flight, discovered amid the wreckage of one plane, confirmed the appearance of the new aircraft.

Subsequently, raids by U.S. bombers based in China were made on Sasebo on July eighth; on Nagasaki on August eleventh; on Yawata on the twentieth and twenty-first; and on Ohmura on October twenty-fifth, November eleventh and twenty-first, December nineteenth and January sixth of the following year but after that, with the B-29 bases being switched to Saipan, attacks from mainland China stopped.

During those months, assisted by pinpoint detection of incoming aircraft by electronic detection stations and spotters, the fighters ensured that bombing damage was kept to a minimum, claiming a total of fifty-one bombers, and losing only nine of their own number.

Of the American crew members who baled out of their disabled aircraft, not counting those who died in the descent, seventeen survived to be taken prisoner. These men were escorted by the kempeitai to defense headquarters in Tokyo.

B-29s operating from bases in Saipan began a concerted bombing campaign on urban targets such as Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, and in March 1945 they again turned their attention to the Kyushu region. Defense by the Nineteenth Air Force Division was so effective that the numbers of American fliers parachuting into captivity increased dramatically. Previously it had been the case that such prisoners of war were to be escorted to camps in Tokyo by the kempeitai, but in early April, the Army Ministry issued a directive to the western regional command delegating authority, stating that the crew members should be "handled as you see fit."

Six days after that order was received, a kempeitai truck carrying twenty-four American fliers pulled up at the rear entrance of the Western Region headquarters. The men were unloaded and shepherded in pairs into cells originally designed to hold local soldiers awaiting court-martial.

That evening, together with a staff officer from the tactical operations center, Takuya was assigned to watch over the prisoners in the cells. The captive crewmen had just been given their evening meal trays, so when Takuya

entered the holding cell area he saw tall, well-built men, some brown-haired and some blond, sitting in their cells eating rice balls flavored with barley, or munching on slices of pickled radish.

Takuya stood in the corridor and stared. The prisoners behind the bars were the first American fliers he had ever set eyes upon.

Takuya, as the officer in charge of the air defense tactical operations center, was among the most knowledgeable of the headquarters staff about the Superfortress bomber. Every time B-29 units intruded into the Kyushu region airspace, his staff painstakingly followed their incoming flight path and then tracked them as they headed off over the sea after completing their missions. Details such as the B-29's total wingspan of 43 meters, its wing surface area of 161.1 square meters, its fully laden weight of 47,000 kilograms, its top speed and altitude of 590 kilometers per hour at 9,500 meters, its maximum range of 8,159 kilometers with a 3-ton load of bombs, its ten 12.7-millimeter machine guns and one 20-millimeter cannon and its maximum bomb load of eight tons, were etched into Takuya's mind, and he had become very familiar with the appearance of the Superfortress by examining photographs of the aircraft both in flight and as wreckage on the ground.

B-29s over Tokyo

His hours of meticulous study of the B-29 enabled Takuya to deduce the likely target by determining the speed and course of the incoming bombers, and then, by calculating the intruders' time spent in Japanese airspace, how much fuel remained, and from that, the probable course and timing of their escape route.

To Takuya and his colleagues who had followed the movements of these aircraft so faithfully since the previous year, the squadron of B-29s were a familiar, almost intimate presence. But now, seeing these American fliers standing and sitting on the other side of the bars, Takuya realized that all along his perception of the enemy had been limited to the airplane itself, and that somehow he had forgotten that there were human beings inside the aircraft.

He was surprised that most of them looked to be around twenty years of age, some as young as seventeen or eighteen. It shocked Takuya to think of the Superfortresses he had tracked so meticulously, constructed with the latest equipment and instrumentation, being manned by young men scarcely past their teens.

Some of the men were the same height as the average Japanese, but most were around six feet tall, and all were endowed with sturdy frames and well-muscled buttocks. To men used to a diet of meat, the rice balls and pickled radish must have hardly even rated as food, nevertheless they munched away at their portions, licking grains of rice off their fingers and biting noisily into the pickles.

Their facial expressions varied. Most avoided eye contact with their captors, but some, whose facial muscles were more relaxed, gazed imploringly toward Takuya and his colleague. Others cast frightened glances at them.
In the end cell a fair-haired man on a straw-filled futon on the concrete floor lay eating a rice ball. A dark bruise from a blow to the face covered the area from his nose to the point of

his right cheekbone, and bandaging on his rib cage was visible through his unbuttoned jacket.

"This one's been shot with a hunting rifle," whispered the slightly built legal officer, appearing suddenly from behind. Takuya looked into the cell as the lieutenant read out the report prepared by the kempeitai on this particular American prisoner. The man had been a crew member of a B-29 involved in a night raid on Yawata and Kokura on the twenty-seventh of March. When his plane was hit, he had parachuted out into the woods near Ono in the Oita area. People from a nearby village seeing this had run out to find the man and clubbed him with sticks before shooting him through the shoulder and right lung with a hunting rifle. Evidently the wounded flier had been handed over to the police by the villagers, and then on to the kempeitai, who had arranged for him to receive medical treatment before being transported to Western Region Headquarters.

The man was obviously aware that people were watching him from the other side of the bars, but he ignored them, staring up at the ceiling as he ate. The man seemed to Takuya to have long eyelashes and a remarkably pointed nose.

When he heard how the villagers had beaten and shot this American, Takuya realized that despite his being a military man, bound by duty to clash with the enemy, his own feelings of hostility toward the B-29 crews paled in comparison to the villagers'. To this point, his contact with the enemy had been limited to information about aircraft detected by electronic listening devices or seen by spotters. In contrast, inhabitants of the mountain villages no doubt felt intense hatred when they saw B-29s flying over, perceiving the objective of the bombers' mission to be nothing less than the mass slaughter of civilians such as themselves. This hatred was the driving force behind their outbursts of violence toward the downed crew members.

Tokyo firebombed.

It occurred to Takuya that these twenty-four American fliers in front of him were the embodiment of an enemy who had slaughtered untold numbers of his own people. They had come back again and again to devastate Japanese towns and cities, leaving behind countless dead and wounded civilians. The idea that these men were receiving rice balls despite the virtual exhaustion of food supplies for the average Japanese citizen stirred anger in Takuya toward those in headquarters responsible for such decisions.

"Look at the awful shoes they've got on," said the officer, with raw contempt in his eyes.

The prisoners' shoes were all made of cloth, reminiscent of those ordinarily worn when embarking on nothing more adventurous than a casual stroll. Some were torn at the seams. Judging from the obvious inexperience of the young men manning the bombers, and from their shoddy footwear, Takuya wondered whether the much-vaunted American affluence was starting to wane.

After that day Takuya was never assigned to watch over the cells, but he nevertheless took a specific interest in the decision over what to do with them. No doubt the Army Ministry had delegated authority over the fliers because the intensified bombing attacks ruled out the

transportation of prisoners to a central destination. This was evident from the concise wording of the order, "handle as you see fit," but even so, the precise meaning of "as you see fit" was unclear.

Takuya thought back to the first raid by B-25 North American medium bombers just four short months after the start of the war. A force of sixteen enemy planes had taken off from an aircraft carrier and flown at low level into the Tokyo and Yokohama area to bomb and strafe targets before retreating toward China, where eight crew members from two planes which crash-landed near Nanchang and Ningbo had been captured by the Imperial Army. A university student at the time, Takuya remembered reading in the newspaper how the captured fliers had been tried by a military court on charges of carrying out bombing attacks designed to kill and wound non-combatants in urban areas, and strafing defenseless schoolchildren and fishermen. All had been found guilty as charged and some were sentenced to death, others to prison terms. Takuya remembered seeing a photograph of the fliers wearing black hoods over their heads as they were led to their execution. [1]

The fact that executions had been carried out after that raid surely left little room for debate over the fate of the twenty-four prisoners now in their custody. Once the B-29s moved their base of operations to Saipan, they began to concentrate their attacks on urban area in general, as opposed to military installations and munitions factories. The Superfortresses gradually switched their targets, dropping huge quantities of incendiary bombs on medium-sized and even smaller towns outside the Kyushu and Shikoku areas. The extent of the devastation was immense; according to reports from central headquarters, evidently already more than one hundred thousand people had been killed and over nine hundred thousand dwellings razed to the ground, affecting over two and a half million people. These fire raids were serious violations of the rules of war, so surely the handling of B-29 crew members would not be bound by provisions regarding the custody of normal prisoners of war.

Processing these prisoners began with interrogating them to acquire information which might help headquarters staff in their efforts against the bombing raids, and as officer in charge of anti-aircraft intelligence Takuya observed the interrogations. There were more general questions about the number of aircraft at the bases in Saipan, the runways, hangars, followed by specific questions about the scale of various kinds of facilities and whether or not there were plans for expansion, question about the capabilities of the B-29, its weak points, and the flight paths used to enter and leave Japanese airspace. The interrogations were carried out both individually and in groups, and the captured crew members replied to the questions posed by interpreter Lieutenant Shirasaka with surprising candor. The content of their answers was consistent and there was no indication whatsoever that they had tried to coordinate their approach to the interrogation. All showed some signs of fear in their eyes, but every so often one of them would shrug his shoulders, casually gesture with his hands and even relax the muscles of his face slightly with the hint of a smile.

One nineteen-year-old crewman looked Shirasaka straight in the face and said he had taken part in twelve raids on cities such as Tokyo, Nagoya and Kobe. There was no mistaking the pride in his expression.

When asked to describe the scene inside the aircraft after dropping the bombs and turning back over the Pacific Ocean toward Saipan, one tall, blond twenty-two- or twenty-three-year-old smiled as he said something in quick reply. Shirasaka seemed momentarily taken aback, but then told the others that the American had said that on the way back the B-29 crew

members would listen to jazz on the radio. Other fliers had replied to the same question by saying that crew members would show each other pornographic photos during the flight back to Saipan.

When he heard Shirasaka's translations of these almost nonchalant remarks Takuya felt the urge to lash out at the prisoner. While Takuya and his comrades had been doing their utmost to minimize the damage to their country, these fliers had been treating the bombing raids as sport. He had seen numerous photographs of wrecked B-29s with pictures of naked women painted on the fuselage beside flame-shaped marks indicating the number of bombing raids the aircraft had made, but now he knew that these men felt no remorse at all for having destroyed the lives and property of so many Japanese civilians.
Until that point, Takuya's image of the enemy had been focused upon the aircraft itself, but now the people who flew it, dropped the bombs from it, and manned its weaponry became his enemy. If there were twelve crew per plane and one hundred bombers taking part in a raid, this represented nothing less than one thousand two hundred of the enemy bent on raining havoc and destruction upon Japanese citizens. Each time he heard that Japanese fighters were engaging the intruders, in his mind's eye he pictured the American machine gunners firing their weapons. When the bombers had reached their target, he imagined the bombardier looking through his sights and pressing the button to open the bomb bay.

With the American landings on Okinawa starting on March twenty-sixth, air raids on the Kyushu region intensified dramatically. The following day, there were attacks by over two hundred B-29s, during daylight hours and then at night, on munitions factories in the Kokura and Yawata areas, and on the thirty-first approximately one hundred seventy Superfortresses attacked Air Force bases in Tachiarai, Kanoya and Ohmura. On both the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth a force of approximately seven hundred thirty enemy warplanes operating from aircraft carriers attacked Air Force and naval targets on the Kyushu eastern coastline and in areas of Kanoya, Kagoshima, Miyazaki and Sasebo.

Into April there were repeated raids on the Tokyo and Nagoya areas, and on the sixteenth, locations in Kyushu were attacked by a combined force of about one hundred bombers and fighters. Raids targeting mainly Air Force installations in Kyushu were carried out on the seventeenth by approximately eighty B-29s and then from the twenty-first to the twenty-ninth by a total of around eight hundred forty Superfortresses. Takuya was kept frantically busy collecting data and issuing air raid warnings.
During this time Takuya came to think that these twenty-four prisoners would likely all be executed, but on the afternoon of the seventeenth of May, he heard that two of the prisoners had been removed from the holding cells and transported by truck to the Faculty of Medicine at Kyushu Imperial University. The aide to the chief of staff who had told Takuya this said that one of the men was the crewman who had been shot through the lung with a hunting rifle and that the other was a flier who had serious problems with his digestive organs. Both, he said, were going to the University Hospital to receive treatment.

On hearing this, Takuya had thought that surely there was little need to take people to hospital for medical treatment if they were to be executed soon, but he assumed there was some policy of having the prisoners as physically sound as possible at the time of the execution.

Into May the air raids became more relentless still. In the eight days between the third and the fourteenth around two hundred fifty B-29s and sixteen hundred fifty carrier-borne aircraft attacked targets all over Kyushu.

Just after midnight on the twenty-third, a force of twenty B-29s dropped a large number of mines in Kanmon Strait before heading east back over the ocean at around 1:40 A.M. In the air battle enacted under a canopy of stars, the interceptors shot down four bombers and inflicted serious damage on four others. Takuya relieved one of his junior officers on the night shift, taking off only his jacket before slipping into the bed in the rest area just off the operations room.

Awaking at eight the next morning, Takuya ate a simple meal of sorghum with barley rice before heading out to the tactical operations center, a concrete structure half set into the ground behind the headquarters building. On the way he saw two prisoners being led along the corridor and out the back door. Both wore black cloth covers over their eyes and handcuffs locked in front of their bodies. They were accompanied by a doctor assigned to military duty and five soldiers carrying rifles with bayonets fixed. The prisoners were pushed onto the deck of an army truck parked in the yard behind the building and the rear flaps of the truck's old tattered hood was pulled down and fastened. An army medical officer was with them, and Takuya guessed that these prisoners must also be going to the University Hospital, although there were no obvious signs that they were wounded or ill in any way.

The truck moved slowly out of the yard and down the slope, flicking gravel from its rear tires.

By this time in late May, Western Region Headquarters staff were working frantically to tighten defenses in their region as part of Imperial Army Headquarters' decision to engage the enemy in a final decisive battle on the Japanese mainland.
In the Okinawa area, the American invasion force comprising around fourteen hundred warships and almost two hundred thousand army and navy personnel had already forced a bridgehead on the island, but tenacious resistance slowed the American advance. In response to these landings, the Japanese mobilized a special attack force centered upon the battleship Yamato, with kamikaze suicide units smashing themselves relentlessly against the oncoming American warships. The kamikaze attacks represented a menace to the American force, but as their only feasible approach to Okinawa was a course following the line of the Nansei Islands, they were easily detected by radar, allowing the Americans to intercept them with large numbers of fighter planes. As a result, losses were significant and the majority of planes in these units were shot down before they could reach their destination.

The American ground troops, assisted by bombardment from warships and strafing from fighters operating off aircraft carriers, gradually pushed forward, and while the Japanese defenders provided determined opposition, they were eventually forced to retreat into the southwestern corner of the main island of Okinawa, where they were now playing out the final act of their resistance.

With the fall of Okinawa a matter of days away, High Command predicted that the Americans would lose little time in turning their efforts toward a full-scale invasion of the Japanese main islands. Based upon this assumption, plans were drawn up for the ultimate battle to defend the homeland, which centered on intense analysis of the enemy's situation. Essentially, the Americans' weak point was that they had to rely upon greatly extended supply lines stretching across the Pacific Ocean, and in contrast to previous battles where Japanese troops had little choice but to make desperate banzai charges on far-flung Pacific islands, it was hoped that in a defense of the mainland itself the Japanese would have a decided advantage. Levels of available manpower were still high, and if the local populace was united in its support of the defensive effort, it was judged that there was a significant chance of

victory. Public declarations were made that this decisive battle would by no means be a defensive struggle, and that it was indeed nothing less than an all-out offensive against the enemy.

There were numerous opinions as to the specific locations the Americans would target for their invasion, but in the end it was assumed that they would most likely select the southern Kyushu area, as that would allow them to use Okinawan airfields as forward bases to provide fighter cover for the ground troops. In terms of specific landing points, it was anticipated that the invasion would be centered upon the Miyazaki coastline, Ariake Bay and points on both the west and south coastlines of the Satsuma Peninsula.

Imperial Headquarters relocated a number of units from Honshu to Kyushu and placed them under the command of the Western Regional Headquarters. In accordance with orders from Tokyo, the extra troops were stationed around the locations judged most likely to bear the brunt of an invasion and with the cooperation of local authorities and the general public, work was begun on the construction of defensive positions. In addition, High Command dispatched a staff officer to Western Headquarters, and other young officers who had completed a course of training at the Imperial Army's Nakano "School" of subterfuge, and specialized in intelligence activities were chosen to take command of, and begin tactical preparation for, units specifically designed to penetrate and disrupt the invading forces.

At the end of May, operating from repaired airfields in Okinawa, the Americans began a concentrated bombing offensive on the Kyushu area. First, on the twenty-eighth of May a combined force of around seventy bombers and fighters attacked targets all over Southern Kyushu, and subsequently, there were raids on both the second and third of June by a total of four hundred twenty carrier-borne aircraft, followed by another combined force of around three hundred bombers and fighters attacking Air Force facilities in Southern Kyushu.

By now the struggle in Okinawa had reached its finale, with the surviving defenders and large numbers of civilian refugees retreating to make a last stand at the southernmost tip of the island. An air of gloom hung over the western headquarters as staff listened in on the wireless communications of the defenders in Okinawa.

On the ninth of June, Takuya was told by the staff officer attached to the tactical operations center that eight of the American prisoners were dead. Evidently those eight were the ones who had been taken in pairs from the holding cells at headquarters to the faculty of medicine at Kyushu Imperial University.

He had been told that the first two captives transported to the University Hospital went to receive treatment, but it now seemed that they had actually been executed by medical staff. The prisoners had been sent to their deaths by staff officer Colonel Tahara and medical officer Haruki, who had come up with the idea of using prisoners condemned to death as guinea pigs in experiments for medical research, and so requested that Professor Iwase of the First Department of Surgery use his good offices to facilitate this.

The two prisoners were anesthetized with ether and carried to the anatomy laboratory, where they were laid on separate dissection tables. Professor Iwase operated to remove portions of the lobe of each of their lungs, but both men died after massive hemorrhaging when arteries were severed in the process. Subsequently, in pairs, another six prisoners were brought to the anatomy laboratory, each undergoing surgery on their stomach, liver, or brain, the complete removal of the gallbladder, or injection of refined seawater into their arteries. All six died

on the operating table during this experimental surgery, and evidently both staff officer Colonel Tahara and medical officer Haruki were present on each occasion.

"They were all well anesthetized and in a coma, so maybe it was a painless way to be executed," whispered staff officer Tahara, adding that the bodies had been cremated on Abura-yama and the ashes buried.

The other staff in the Tactical Operations Center learned about the eight prisoners during the course of that day. Colonel Tahara instructed them not to mention what had happened to anyone else, telling them that the official stance was to be that these prisoners had been sent to Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo.

While Takuya felt no particular emotion about their death, it struck him that executing them by means of experimental surgery was rather unusual. Still, regardless of the method used, he did not falter in his belief that it was only natural that they should die for their sins. In fact, more than anything, he felt increasingly indignant that the remaining prisoners were still alive in the headquarters compound and depleting precious food stocks.

That evening, in the Headquarters Judicial Department, the remaining sixteen prisoners were arraigned before a formal military tribunal, and based upon a reexamination of the transcripts of their interrogations it was confirmed that every one of the fliers had taken part in bombing urban targets. All were found guilty of charges of murder of non-combatants and based upon the tenets of international law, all were sentenced to death. [2]

The following day, another seventeen fliers who had been captured after parachuting from B-29s shot down over Kyushu were delivered to the rear entrance of the headquarters building in a kempeitai truck before being put into the holding cells together with the previous batch of prisoners. However, the cells were too small to handle the influx of prisoners, and with four men in each it was almost impossible for all of them to lie down, so the Judicial Department moved immediately to convert the litigants' waiting room in their part of the building into an extra holding cell for some of the newcomers.

During the next few days, Takuya found himself virtually confined to the Tactical Operations Center. On the eighth of June, reconnaissance photographs taken by a plane flying over U.S. Air Force facilities in Okinawa were delivered to headquarters showing that airfields in North and Central Okinawa, plus those on Iejima, were fully operational, and confirming the existence of at least five hundred twenty-three fighters and bombers. Takuya and his comrades all sensed that an intensification of attacks on Kyushu was impending and that the stage was set for the decisive battle for the homeland.

On the evening of the eighteenth of June, the mood at Western Headquarters grew somber. On the radio they had heard the farewell message from Lieutenant-General Ushijima Mitsuru, commander of the Thirty-second Army in Okinawa to Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo, informing his superiors that he was about to give his life for the Emperor's cause. "While to a man, our forces have fought with supreme heroism over the last two months, the enemy's overwhelming numerical superiority on land, sea and air has meant that this struggle has entered its closing stages. I most humbly report that the final preparations are in hand to lead those surviving soldiers to a glorious death."

The final battle for Okinawa was a struggle of apocalyptic proportions. According to reports from pilots of reconnaissance planes, the pummeling of the southern tip of the island by concentrated bombardment from warships, ground-based artillery and bombing was such that it looked as though there had been a huge

volcanic eruption, with streams of tracer bullets, raging fires and plumes of grey and black smoke all adding a macabre effect to the hellish scene. Since the battle for Saipan in the struggles for the islands across the North Pacific, non-combatants not only had been embroiled in the conflict but also had lost their lives, together with the soldiers of each defending garrison. No doubt this tragedy had been repeated in Okinawa, with scores of old men, women and children losing their lives in the bombardment or choosing to die by their own hands. [3]

That same night, the news came that a force of fifty B-29s based in Saipan had attacked Hamamatsu and another thirty had raided the city of Yokkaichi, both attacks involving incendiaries and both resulting in conflagrations so destructive that the targets were virtually burnt to cinders. To date, the number of aircraft counted as having been involved in bombing raids on targets in Japan had soared to over twenty thousand, claiming around four hundred thousand lives, destroying one million six hundred thousand homes and producing six million three hundred thousand refugees.

The next morning brought blue skies, with the meteorological office forecasting fine weather all over Kyushu. To those in the tactical operations center, this meant a drastically increased likelihood of large-scale bombing raids, and orders were issued for spotters to be particularly vigilant.

The daylight hours passed uneventfully, and when the sun dipped low in the evening the bright red of the western sky signaled that another fine day would follow. Within minutes of the sunset the sky was a mass of twinkling stars.
That night, around 7:50 P.M., a report came in from an electronic listening post set to cover the Hyuga coastline that a force of aircraft was heading northwest over that quadrant of the Kyushu defensive perimeter. As there was nothing to suggest that this represented friendly aircraft on patrol, Takuya immediately assumed that it was a force of B-29s from Saipan and issued an air raid warning to all areas of northern Kyushu.

Knowing that a lone Superfortress had flown a reconnaissance mission over Fukuoka the previous night, Takuya expected that before long Kyushu's largest city would bear the brunt of an attack. Tens of thousands of tons of incendiaries had already reduced major urban centers such as Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka to scorched wastelands, but so far attacks on Kyushu had mostly been limited to military targets or munitions factories, and the island had been spared the saturation raids aimed at razing towns and cities to the ground. Okinawa was now completely in American hands, and it took no stretch of the imagination to gauge that their next move would be to obliterate the cities of Kyushu before launching their invasion force onto Kyushu's beaches.

Red lights lit up on the otherwise darkened map of Kyushu on the wall of the operations room as one after another reports of aircraft intruding into the perimeter came in from electronic listening points. The sequence of the lights indicated that the enemy bombers were proceeding on a course toward northern Kyushu.

Processing the incoming data, Takuya realized that this force, comprising around seventy aircraft, had split into two separate groups somewhere over Hita City in Oita Prefecture. Around ten planes were continuing straight on their original course while the other sixty had pulled around slightly toward the northwest. It was presumed that the aircraft on the unchanged, straight course were on what would be the fifth mission to drop mines in the Kanmon Strait area, adding to the total of eighty planes which had already done so, and that the other, larger group was heading for

Fukuoka. When incoming reports confirmed beyond a doubt that Fukuoka was indeed the target, the Tactical Operations Center immediately issued an air raid warning for the city and its environs.

The first word that intruders had entered Fukuoka airspace came from Dazaifu, just southeast of the metropolitan area, and was soon followed by reports of aircraft sighted above the city itself. Takuya knew from the data received that the bombers were likely deploying at low level over the city and by now would have started their bombing runs. It seemed that the intruders which had followed the line of the Nakagawa River into the city had dropped their load on Shin-Yanagi-Machi and the Higashi-Nakasu area, resulting in a surge of reports of fires raging in those areas.

Those in the tactical operations center, set partially into the ground and encased in reinforced concrete, were removed from the thunderous blasts of exploding bombs and the clamor of a city in the throes of incineration. Takuya and his fellow officers stood staring at the red lamps on the map of Kyushu stretched across one wall. The lights indicating the Fukuoka urban area remained on, as did those positioned to represent Kanmon Strait, confirming that the smaller force of ten aircraft had reached its predicted target.

Takuya sat motionless, staring at the map on the wall in front of his desk. Although the sky above the headquarters building was swarming with enemy planes, and the area around their safe haven was likely engulfed in flames, the atmosphere within the operations room was almost tranquil. As officer in charge of anti-aircraft intelligence, Takuya focused his attention solely on imparting information about the movements of enemy aircraft, and to him there was no difference between planes directly above and planes attacking some more distant region within the defensive perimeter.

Anti-aircraft batteries and searchlight units along the Kanmon Strait coastline had been reinforced in late May, and reports were now coming in that these units were engaging the Superfortresses dropping mines in shipping channels. Two hours after the initial sightings, these bombers seemed to have finished dropping their mines and had turned back south. Around the same time, reports began to come in that the force which had targeted Fukuoka had started to move in a southerly direction. The Superfortresses had clearly completed their mission and were heading back.

One by one red lamps went out as the smaller force of intruders headed south from Kanmon Strait, then joined up again over Hita City with the main force which had ravaged Fukuoka, and changed to a course directly southeast. A short time later the aircraft were detected crossing the line between Hosojima in Miyazaki Prefecture and Sukumo in Kochi Prefecture. Similar reports followed from the listening points covering the line between Aojima further down the Miyazaki coastline and Sukumo over in Shikoku, confirming that the bombers were about to disappear across the Hyuga Sea back toward Saipan.

Orders were issued to give the “all-clear” for all areas of the Kyushu region, and only now was Takuya able finally to leave his desk. The enemy planes were officially recorded as having left Japanese airspace at 3:37 A.M., seven hours and forty minutes after the original intrusion.

Takuya wanted to see for himself what the situation was like outside the confines of the operations room, and the lack of incoming reports meant in effect that he had finished his duty for the night, so there was no reason why he could not slip away from the post for a short time.

Delegating the remaining duties to his

subordinates, Takuya hurried out of the room and down the dimly lit corridor. The moment he opened the outer section of the double steel doors he was consumed by a deafening roar. Each breath he took of the superheated air seemed to scorch the inside of his lungs. Everything on the outside, the trees, the headquarters building, the ground, was bright red. Powerful gusts of wind lashed the branches of trees, and scurries of singed leaves danced across the ground.

Takuya stepped away from the steel doors and ran a few paces to the edge of the backyard, where he stopped, riveted by the terrifying scene before his eyes. Huge swirling towers of flames reached skyward from a seething conflagration covering an almost endless expanse below him. One thunderous roar followed another, resounding like waves crashing into a cliff, hurling sheets of fire and angry streams of sparks into the night sky. The barracks just to the west of where Takuya stood had been razed, and a frenzied swarm of soldiers were using hoses and buckets to throw water onto the headquarters building. The men were all as tinged red as everything else was in this glimpse of the inferno.

Takuya had heard reports about cities being devastated by incendiaries, but the destruction he was witnessing far surpassed anything he had ever imagined. Like masses of towering whitecaps soaring up from a tempestuous sea, a myriad of flames seemed to press upward from the heart of the blaze. His face felt so hot he thought it must be burning, and the billows of smoke stung his eyes.

The city contained neither military installations nor munitions factories, so the purpose of the fire raid could only have been to kill and maim civilians and reduce their dwellings to ashes. The thought flashed through his mind that the scene he was witnessing had been repeated time and time again in other cities and towns all over Japan, with innumerable non-combatants being sent to their deaths. [4]

The strength of interceptor fighter units in Kyushu had been dramatically reduced through U.S. bombing attacks on Air Force facilities in the area, and that night, too, there were no reports of Superfortresses being shot down by fighters, so the anti-aircraft batteries had more or less been left to defend the island's skies by themselves.
Takuya blinked painfully as he gazed into the sea of flames.

#

Dawn came.

Reports came flooding into the tactical operations center outlining the level of damage in Fukuoka City. The fires had been extinguished by around 6 A.M. but apart from the Tenjin-machi and Hakozaki-machi areas, the entire city center had been burnt to the ground, with an estimated ten thousand dwellings destroyed in the fires. Early reports suggested that the death toll would be extremely high.

Subsequent reports described citizens who had fled during the night returning to survey the smoldering embers of what had been their homes starting around ten o'clock that morning; shortly after that several dozen such people had gathered around the front gate of the headquarters complex clamoring for the execution of the captive fliers. There were said to be a large number of women among the crowd, and moreover, some of them had been weeping as they screamed out for the crewmen to be killed. No doubt they were infuriated at the thought that the Americans were still alive and had remained safe from the blaze thanks to the firefighting efforts of the garrison. While the prisoners might also have been afraid at the thought of being burned alive, they also might have felt some kind of satisfaction in knowing that it was their compatriots who were

raining death and destruction on the city below.

Takuya had little difficulty understanding the thinking of the people who had gathered in front of the main gate. The prisoners not only had burned to death thousands of defenseless old men, women and children, but were now being kept alive with a steady supply of food that the average person in the street could only dream about. Surely there was no reason to let them live any longer.

"What the hell are they up to in headquarters? They should execute them as soon as possible," muttered Takuya to himself.
Medical Officer Haruki's name was on the list of dead. In conjunction with his work as deputy head doctor at the military hospital adjacent to the headquarters building, he had been given the honorary rank of lieutenant, and he was attending a doctors' meeting when the air raid started the previous evening. Evidently he had been unable to make it to safety when their building caught fire. The fatality reports also listed the names of several non-commissioned officers and numerous enlisted men and civilian employees working at headquarters. Word also started coming in of family members of headquarters' staff killed in the firestorms that had ravaged the city's residential areas.

Takuya could hear all this news being reported as he worked at his tasks as anti-aircraft intelligence officer. A deterioration in the weather meant that raids were unlikely from Saipan-based aircraft, but all the same, as the possibility of more short-range attacks by bombers flying up the line of the Nansei Islands from bases in Okinawa could not be ruled out, Takuya was paying particular attention to reports coming in from the southern Kyushu region.

Takuya had just finished eating a late lunch of sorghum with barley rice and a piece of salted salmon when a staff officer from headquarters briskly entered his room, stepped up to Takuya's desk and announced in an impassioned voice, "It's on."
At Takuya's puzzled look, the lieutenant blurted out that it had been decided that eight of the prisoners in the holding cells were to be executed, and that this was to be carried out immediately in the courtyard of what used to be a girls' high school, directly behind the headquarters complex. Takuya was told that the prisoners were to be decapitated, and that headquarters staff with considerable experience in kendo had already been selected. Takuya was to arrange for two of his subordinates to be made available to participate in the executions.

Takuya nodded his understanding and beckoned the two sergeant-majors sitting on the other side of the room to come over to his desk. When he told them they would be taking part in the executions the color drained from their faces and a look of trepidation came to their eyes.

"One good clean blow. Don't let us down," growled Takuya.

The two men stood stiffly to attention as they barked their reply.

They were men with much longer service records than himself, including combat experience at the front, and Takuya could not comprehend how they had the gall to show even a trace of apprehension at the mention of the executions. Rumor that one of the men had reputedly succeeded in beheading two Chinese prisoners with successive blows made their attitude all the more enraging to Takuya. Possibly their stint at office work on the home front had dulled the mental hardness they would have honed on the battlefield.

Takuya watched as they put on their service caps, picked up their swords and left the room. By then, a weather report had come in that rain

had started to fall in southern Kyushu, and in line with this, no sightings of enemy aircraft were reported. Takuya's subordinates worked away collating the mountain of damage reports received from the city.

Around two o'clock the door opened and the two sergeant-majors walked in, one behind the other. Takuya searched their faces for a hint of emotion. They were both pale but there was a strangely radiant look in their eyes. Their brows glistened with sweat as though they had come from vigorous exercise, and a tangible heat emanated from their bodies.

They stepped toward Takuya's desk and in an animated voice one reported, "Duties completed, sir!"

"How was it? Did all go well?" asked Takuya.

"Yes sir, we each executed one prisoner," replied one of the sergeant-majors, exhilaration lingering in his eyes.

"Well done," said Takuya, nodding his approval. The two soldiers returned to their desks and wiped their brows with hand cloths.

Takuya heard that four regular officers and three non-commissioned officers had taken part in the executions that day, including Lieutenant Howa Kotaro of the paymasters' section, the only man who had volunteered. A graduate of Tokyo Commercial University, Howa was a mild-mannered man known for his skill at writing tanka poetry. That morning he had hurried down through the smoldering ruins of the Kojiya-machi area of Fukuoka to the house where his mother lived. It had burnt to the ground, so he waited for his mother to return from wherever she might have sheltered during the air raid. Casting his eyes over the sheets of roofing iron scattered across the ruins at the end of the little alleyway, he saw a black object resembling a scorched piece of timber. When he looked more closely and saw the gold-capped teeth showing from the gaping burnt hole that had once been a mouth, he realized that this was the charred corpse of his mother. He wrapped her body in a piece of singed straw matting and asked a neighbor to look after it until he could come back to give her a proper funeral. Howa returned to headquarters and began working silently on his mother's coffin. Those attached to the tactical operations center were in charge of organizing the executions, but when Howa heard that the American fliers were to be killed, the request he made to the staff officer in charge of the operations room to be allowed to take part was so compelling that his name was added to the list. A member of the kendo club during his university days, Howa was the only man among the executioners to decapitate two of the prisoners.

While these executions temporarily relieved the frustration Takuya felt, each time he stepped outside the operations room and caught the horrific sight of a city razed to the ground, irrepressible anger and pain welled up inside him. According to reports issued by the municipal office the death toll was over one thousand, with over fifty thousand families

losing their homes and untold thousands of people injured in the conflagration. Everywhere there were dazed people sifting through the ashes of the scorched ruins. Here and there groups of men, women and children sat listlessly on the side of the road. Viewing such scenes, and contemplating the fact that these people were destitute because of the B-29 fire raids, he thought it an injustice that the remaining prisoners were still safe inside the headquarters building.

The day after the incendiary attack on Fukuoka City the key members of the Headquarters staff moved to caves near Yamae Village in the Tsukushi area, leaving behind only those doing work related to anti-aircraft intelligence. After the attack on Fukuoka, the U.S. Air Force started saturation bombing raids on other main cities and towns in Kyushu. First, on the twenty-ninth of June, a force of ten B-29s bombed Nobeoka in Miyazaki Prefecture, and then Kanoya in Kagoshima Prefecture. Beginning in July, attacks were made on cities and towns such as Kurume, Yatsushiro, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Oita, Omuta and Miyazaki.

Among those left to work on anti-aircraft intelligence tension mounted as preparations were accelerated to meet the expected American landings on Kyushu. Defensive earthworks were being constructed everywhere, artillery pieces placed in caves facing the sea and special kamikaze attack aircraft hidden in underground shelters.

Plans were also being made to strengthen the mobile reserve, the Thirty-sixth Army, by redeploying three infantry divisions from the Chugoku and Kinki areas, and by moving the pride of the mainland defensive forces, two elite armored divisions and six reserve divisions from the Kanto region ready to meet the enemy in Kyushu.

With such crucial forces being readied, Takuya began to sense that the last decisive moments of the war were close at hand. If the remaining armies played their part in the grand defensive strategy prepared by Imperial Headquarters, it would be possible for Japan to deal the American forces a body blow. There was no doubting Japan's advantage in terms of supply lines, and willingness of the ten million inhabitants of Kyushu to do their utmost to contribute to the success of the defensive effort. While Takuya did not doubt that Japan would be victorious in the coming battles, he now had a premonition that he himself would not live through the titanic struggle about to unfold. At least, he hoped, he would succumb knowing that he had inflicted the greatest damage possible on the enemy.

That summer was much hotter than average. The steel doors had been pushed wide open, but because the tactical operations center was encased in a thick layer of reinforced concrete it was oppressively hot inside the building, the lone fan sending a stream of hot air across the desks. Sweat dripping from their brows, Takuya and his colleagues went on working at processing incoming information and preparing the anti-aircraft defenses to meet the next bombing raid.

Toward the end of July there was a dramatic increase in the number of enemy aircraft participating in each attack. On the twenty-eighth, a total of 3,210 planes attacked targets in the Kanto, Tokai and Kinki regions, while around 650 carrier-borne planes made bombing and strafing sorties over Kyushu, some of the latter aircraft even going so far as to attack targets in the Korea Strait and the southern region of the Korean Peninsula. The following day, the twenty-ninth, a force of 361 carrier-borne bombers and fighters attacked targets in central and southern Kyushu. The same areas were attacked by 379 aircraft on the thirtieth, 148 planes on the first of August, and another 220 on the fifth of August. The fact that these attacks were concentrated on military and

coastal installations was judged to be an indication that the American invasion of Kyushu was imminent, and Western Command Headquarters was on a constant alert for news that the invasion fleet had been sighted.

Near-windless days with clear blue skies continued, and the morning temperatures on August sixth augured another sweltering day. Forecasting another large-scale attack that day, the tactical operations center issued orders for no relaxation of the full-alert conditions in all areas of Kyushu.

Just after eight in the morning Takuya looked up from his desk, his attention caught by something distant, yet quite audible. A strange, almost rending sound, as if a huge piece of paper had been violently ripped in two. Seconds later a palpable shock wave jolted the air. His subordinates all sat stock-still and looked in bewilderment. No enemy planes had been reported intruding into Kyushu airspace, and the sound they had just heard was clearly different from anything they had yet experienced. Takuya thought it had perhaps been a distant peal of thunder.

Later that day, as expected, a combined force of 180 bombers and fighters from bases in Okinawa attacked targets in southern Kyushu. Takuya was kept busy processing incoming reports and issuing orders to anti-aircraft defense units in that region.
That afternoon a communiqué from Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo notified them of the truth about the ominous sound and shock wave they had felt that morning. The message stated that at 8:15 A.M. two B-29s had intruded into Japanese airspace on a flight path over the Bungo Channel before sweeping northeast toward Hiroshima, where one of them had dropped a special new-type bomb which had caused extensive damage. It went on to advise that on no account was the extreme state of alert to be relaxed.

Western Command Staff tried in vain to contact the Central Region Command Headquarters in Hiroshima by telephone, but before long they received an updated report from Imperial Command in Tokyo to the effect that Hiroshima had been completely devastated, and tens of thousands of people killed or wounded. Considering that the sound and shock wave from the explosion had carried a full two hundred kilometers from Hiroshima to Fukuoka, Takuya and his colleagues realized that this bomb must possess a fearful destructive power far exceeding that of normal bomb technology.

Over the next several hours, a range of reports came in about the new bomb. Evidently, after being dropped it had descended attached to a parachute and had exploded several hundred meters above the ground, unleashing a blinding white flash of light, and punching a turbulent yellowish white mushroom-shaped cloud up to ten or twenty thousand meters into the sky.

The next day, the seventh, Imperial Command made a brief announcement on the radio regarding the bombing of Hiroshima. First, that the previous day, Hiroshima had been attacked by a small number of enemy B-29 aircraft and had suffered extensive damage; and second, that surveys were under way to establish the nature of the new weapon that had been used in this attack. While reports from Imperial Command had mentioned nothing that specific, information had now been received to the effect that this new weapon was probably what was being called an “atomic bomb.” The term itself was new to Takuya and his staff, but from the incoming reports it was clear that the weapon’s destructive power was something completely unheard of.

That evening Colonel Tahara, the staff officer assigned to the tactical operations center, returned from a visit to Air Force Operational Command. The aircraft he had travelled in had stopped off in Hiroshima en route back to

Fukuoka. He described how the city had been reduced to ruins, with corpses lying everywhere.

An air of oblivion hung over the staff in the headquarters building, and few uttered even a word. Each struggled to understand how, in addition to devastating fire raids on towns and cities throughout the country, the American military could unleash a new weapon of such destructive power expressly designed to kill and maim a city's civilian inhabitants. As fresh reports trickled in detailing the situation in Hiroshima, Takuya felt with increasing conviction that the American military had ceased to recognize the Japanese as members of the human race. Evidently all the buildings had been demolished and a large portion of the city's population annihilated in an instant. How, thought Takuya, did the thinking behind this differ from the mass incineration of a nest of vermin?

Two days later, on the ninth of August, news of grave concern was received at headquarters. The Soviet Union not only had unilaterally renounced the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, but had also declared war on Japan. The Red Army forces were already advancing across the border with Manchuria to engage the Kwantung Army. It was clear that the timing of the Soviet offensive was linked to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and that with the Russians commencing hostilities, Japan was now surrounded by enemies on all sides. Takuya sensed that the day he would be called upon to give his life for his country was near.

That morning at about 7:40 A.M., a report came in from electronic detection posts that aircraft had crossed the line between Aoshima in Miyazaki Prefecture and Sukumo in Kochi Prefecture on Shikoku Island; subsequently they were detected crossing the line between Hosojima in Miyazaki and Sukumo, so an alert was issued, followed by a full air raid warning. But as spotters reported no sightings of intruders in that area of Kyushu, the order to sound the all-clear was issued at 8:30 A.M. The high state of alert was maintained in the tactical operations center, and when a report was received from aircraft spotters on Kunisaki Peninsula that two Superfortresses had been seen heading westward, the order to sound the air raid warning alarms was reissued at 10:53 A.M.

The fact that only two B-29s were sighted, as in the attack three days earlier, pointed strongly toward the likelihood that one of these intruders was carrying a bomb of the type which had devastated Hiroshima, and the course of the aircraft suggested that their target was a city in the northern Kyushu area.

The two aircraft continued west until they reached the city of Kokura, where they circled for a short time before the dense cloud cover evidently forced them to switch to a contingency target to the southwest. Judging from the aircrafts' flight path, the tactical operations center staff speculated that the target had been switched to the city of Nagasaki and so radio and telex messages were sent to that city straightaway to warn them of the approaching bombers and advise that everyone should be ordered to evacuate immediately. To avoid panicking among the populace, however, no mention was made of the possibility that the bombers were carrying the same type of weapon which had destroyed Hiroshima.

Virtually incapacitated with anxiety, Takuya and his colleagues sat mesmerized by the red lamps on the wall map indicating the movement of the two B-29s. The lamps showed the planes moving inexorably over the Ariake Sea and then down across the northern section of the Shimabara Peninsula, approaching Nagasaki from the northeast and seeming almost to stop for a moment over the city before heading east and then disappearing off in the direction of Okinawa.

Queasy with foreboding, Takuya sat at his desk and waited for damage reports from Nagasaki. The only solace was the fact that they heard no sound nor felt any shock wave like that experienced when the new bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

Before long, however, his worst fears were realized. A report came in from Ohmura Air Force Base that a brilliant white light had been seen a split second before a thunderous explosion had rocked the ground where they stood, and a huge mushroom-shaped cloud had risen skyward above Nagasaki. There was no further communication until, after some time, reports began flooding in that the city had suffered extensive damage, some information even suggesting that the bomb had been dropped on a residential area in the northern part of Nagasaki. The bomb was obviously of the same type as the one which had destroyed Hiroshima. The thought that the tragedy which had been visited upon Hiroshima had now been reenacted in Nagasaki made it impossible for Takuya to remain sitting calmly at his desk.

That day, Takuya heard that eight prisoners had been executed by headquarters staff who had been relocated to the caves near Yamae Village. Apparently the executions had been carried out in the woods near the municipal crematorium at Higashi-Abura-Yama, to the south of Fukuoka. Among the staff were a number of officers from the Nakano "School" of subterfuge, readying themselves for their mission of infiltrating enemy lines once the Americans landed. Evidently these men had used the blindfolded prisoners as targets to test the effectiveness of Taiwanese Takasago tribe hunting bows provided by a local archery club, but with such poor results that the idea of using them as weapons was abandoned. After the abortive experiment, the prisoners were taken one by one into a small clearing deeper in the forest, where they were beheaded. The bodies were then wrapped in straw mats and buried in shallow graves.

Distracted by the thought of the devastation inflicted upon Nagasaki, and frantically busy processing data and issuing air raid warnings and all-clear signals following the attacks by a combined force of approximately three hundred bombers and fighters on targets all over Kyushu that day, Takuya registered what had happened to the American prisoners, but had no time to ponder their fate.

The following day, the tenth of August, another combined force of about 210 bombers and fighters darkened the skies of Kyushu, pummeling Kumamoto and Oita cities with incendiaries. In the course of two hours in the morning of the eleventh, over 150 aircraft wreaked havoc on the city of Kurume, destroying 4,500 homes. There was no respite from the raids; around 200 planes attacked Kyushu on the twelfth followed by another 150 B-29s on the fourteenth. Massive quantities of bombs were dropped on Kyushu, and there were even reports of large numbers of schoolchildren being killed in the relentless strafes attacks by American fighter planes.

By now, urban centers in Kyushu had been reduced to ashes, munitions factories all but destroyed, and food supplies diminished to such an extent that those living in the vicinity of the main cities and towns were on the verge of starvation. The destruction of most port facilities, the dropping of large numbers of mines into the sea, and the lurking menace of enemy submarines made maritime transport virtually impossible, and, from the last ten days of July, the frequency of daytime sorties by U.S. fighters over southern Kyushu virtually ruled out rail transport during daylight hours.

On the evening of the fourteenth of August Takuya heard from a colleague some news such that he could hardly believe his ears. Evidently the man had been told by an officer attached to the headquarters staff in the caves at Yamae that there were indications that some central government officials were prepared to accept

the unconditional terms of the Potsdam Declaration, and that at noon of the following day, the fifteenth, the Emperor would be making a radio announcement of momentous importance. Apparently the broadcast would either ratify the acceptance of the Declaration, or reject it, with the likelihood of the former being very strong.

Surely this couldn't be true. The deployment of reinforcements, the preparation of weaponry and strengthening of the defenses around the predicted landing points in Kyushu were complete. Military installations and munitions factories may have been destroyed and cities may have been razed, but there were still enough forces left to repel the Americans. The decisive struggle was yet to come; before its outcome was clear, it should be unthinkable to even consider surrendering.

This supposedly reliable information from government sources in Tokyo surely represented nothing more than the view of a small group of weak-kneed politicians, thought Takuya. Their likes should be exterminated immediately for harboring such treasonous thoughts on the even of the decisive battle for the homeland.

Takuya felt discomposed as he attended to his duties. When he heard the seemingly interminable reports of American bombers and fighters attacking targets across the entire country, he couldn't help but think that this talk of surrender must be mere groundless rumor. Enemy aircraft were just as active that day as on any other day, with around 250 Superfortresses attacking targets in the Kanto, Fukushima and Niigata areas over a total of four hours starting just before midnight on the fourteenth. Within hours of those raids, a force of around 250 carrier-borne aircraft made yet another wave of strikes on the Kanto area in the two hours after sunrise. Surely, thought Takuya, if the suggestion that the purpose of the Emperor's impending radio broadcast was to accept the Potsdam Declaration carried any credence, this would have already been conveyed to the Allies, who would in turn have ordered the American military to cease hostilities. The fact that a total of as many as 500 aircraft bombed and strafed targets all over the country from the night of the fourteenth through into the early hours of the morning of the fifteenth was indeed proof that the war between the United States and Japan was continuing unabated.

After regaining his composure, Takuya stole a couple of hours' sleep before returning to his post at 8 A.M. The weather forecast was for clear skies and high temperatures, so more large-scale air raids were expected in the course of the day.

As noon approached Takuya ordered his staff to assemble in the operations room, the men standing rigidly to attention in two neat rows. As he waited for the broadcast he thought that the Emperor could only be taking this unheard-of step to deliver words of inspiration to his people before the curtain went up on the final decisive battle for the homeland.

The hands of the clock reached noon, and after a recording of the national anthem the Emperor's announcement began. It was delivered in a strange, high-pitched voice, reminding Takuya of the prayers he'd heard recited by Shinto priests. Takuya and his comrades stood stiffly at attention, their heads bowed. The sound quality of the radio in the tactical operations center was excellent, and the transmission of the Imperial rescript could be heard clearly by all present.

Takuya listened intently to every word and lifted his head in disbelief on hearing the words "We have ordered Our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that Our Empire accepts the provisions of their Joint Declaration." This "joint

declaration" obviously referred to the Potsdam Declaration, acceptance of which meant nothing less than unconditional surrender.

Takuya felt suffocated. He couldn't believe this was happening. He had known that the war would some day come to an end, but his notion of that end was always that Japan would be the victor. Beyond a doubt, the current fortunes of war clearly favored the enemy, and it might take months, even yeas, before the tide could be turned and victory claimed. By this stage, in his mind, the victory he had envisaged had been deferred to the more distant future, a point in time which Takuya felt less and less confident he himself would reach. In any case, it was unthinkable that the war should end in defeat. And to concede defeat in this fashion, before the decisive battle for the homeland, was even more inconceivable.

When the broadcast finished, Takuya felt faint, and had to consciously prevent his knees from buckling. The Emperor's words echoed inside his head, leaving no room for other thoughts.

Takuya's men all stared in his direction, the bewilderment on their faces revealing that they had failed to comprehend the broadcast. Some even seemed buoyed by the Emperor's words, having interpreted the message as a veiled exhortation to redouble their efforts on the eve of the final struggle. Clearly the men were confused by the lack of direct mention of the word "defeat," and did not realize that Japan was about to surrender to the Allies.

Takuya turned toward the men, and in an emphatic tone said, "It's all over. We've lost." His strength draining from him, he shuffled back behind his desk and slumped into his chair.

The men remained as they were, staring at Takuya in disbelief. Moments later, muffled sobs could be heard from among the ranks. Propping his elbows on his desk, Takuya fixed his eyes firmly on the knots in its surface.

Eventually the men started to move silently back to their own desks.

Takuya pondered what would happen after the surrender. American warships would likely put U.S. troops ashore all over Japan, and enemy aircraft would swarm onto surviving airfields delivering loads of soldiers and weapons. No doubt the victors would waste little time in menacing the populace into submission as they went on to occupy all of Japan. Physically sound males would be forcibly relocated to work somewhere as laborers, and most likely, young women would become the object of the victors' sexual desires. Those who resisted, he thought, would be thrown into prison or shot.

As if time had stopped, Takuya remained immobilized in his chair, a look of physical and mental exhaustion on his face.
The door opened and staff officer Colonel Tahara came in. When one of the men called the room to attention, Takuya stood up and bowed to his superior.

The colonel walked up to Takuya. "You heard His Majesty's speech. We've had direct word from High Command that the Emperor has agreed to accept the Potsdam Declaration. Orders are to burn all documentation at once," he said hurriedly before disappearing out the door again.

Takuya turned to the men and barked out the order. "Burn every document in the building. Now go to it!"

That defeat could become a reality with such frightening ease dumbfounded Takuya. His notion of defeat had involved all branches of the Japanese Imperial forces choosing death before dishonor, and his own demise had been a certainty in that scenario. He realized that there was nothing left for him to do. By now, High Command would have already conveyed

the news about the cease-fire to the air defense spotters and those manning the electronic aircraft-detection posts, so there would be no more incoming reports to process, no more data to assess, no more air raid alerts to issue. His duties had come to an end.
Unable to watch his men piling documents into boxes, Takuya left his desk and stepped out of the room. The corridor was busy with stern-faced men carrying armfuls of paper to and fro. Takuya walked down the hallway and out through the steel doors at the rear of the building.

The sunlight was so brilliant that for a moment he felt dizzy. The trees, the ground, the stones all seemed to be parched white. A sensation came over him as though the air was seething, engulfing him in a myriad of tiny air bubbles. He squinted as he fought the dizziness. In the rear courtyard, the soldiers had already started a bonfire and were burning the piles of documents that had been carried out through the back door. The fire was burning fiercely now, the flames flickering like red cellophane in the midday sun.
From the rear entrance to the building, among the soldiers carrying bundles of paper, appeared the lieutenant from the legal affairs section, walking straight toward Takuya. His pursed lips were dry and his eyes glistened. Stopping in front of Takuya, he explained that the request he was about to make was an order from the major sent as a staff officer from High Command.
“The prisoners are to be executed. You are to provide your two sergeant-majors to help. If we don’t deal with the last of them before the enemy lands, they’ll talk about what happened to the others. There are seventeen left. It’s to be done straightaway. People from headquarters staff up near Yamae Village are waiting.”

Takuya understood that to those at headquarters, the prisoners’ execution was as important a task now as the burning of all documents. They had already been sentenced to death, and the fact that hostilities had ceased had no bearing whatsoever on their execution.

While his duties collecting data and issuing air raid alerts had finished, Takuya now once again sensed that his destiny was linked to that of the captured fliers. He had followed their actions for days and months on end, had busied himself to the very last collecting data about the aircraft which dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, had personally issued the air raid alert and the order to evacuate the city. More than most, Takuya had been in a position to know the full extent of the damage caused by the bombing and strafing attacks carried out by these men. So far his duties had assigned him a passive role, but that was all over now, and the time had come, he thought, for him to actively show his mettle. Only then would his duties be finished.

At the time of the previous two executions, Takuya’s responsibilities as officer in charge of the tactical operations center had kept him at his post, but the Emperor’s broadcast released him from all duties. I want to participate in the executions, he thought. Taking the life of one of the prisoners with his own hands would be his final duty. The lieutenant had said that the executions would be carried out in order to dispose of remaining evidence, but for Takuya it was something personal, something he had to do as officer in charge of air defense intelligence.

“Count me in too,” said Takuya.

The lieutenant nodded. “We’ll be leaving soon,” he said, then hastened back into the building.

Takuya followed him through the steel doors and hurried down the corridor to the air defense operations room, where he called out to one of the sergeant-majors. The man had been removing documents from a filing cabinet,

but came quickly over to Takuya when his name was called. His expression did not change in the slightest when he was told that he was to take part in the executions. A firm "Yes sir" was all he said.

Takuya ordered the second of the two sergeant-majors to continue burning the documents. Putting on his service cap, he walked out of the room followed by the first sergeant-major.

The prisoners, blindfolded with black cloth and their hands tied together with twine, were being loaded onto the decks of two trucks pulled up outside. Takuya couldn't help being struck again by the physical size of the men in front of him.

A sergeant and a couple of lance corporals jumped up onto the deck after them and pulled down the canvas cover. The trucks moved off slowly past the bonfire and down the gentle slope.

Takuya and the sergeant-major stood under a cherry tree watching the hive of activity in the courtyard as soldiers holding bundles of documents hurried out to throw the papers onto the fire, then scurried inside for more. The air was dead calm and no sound was heard above the snapping of the fire.

The major from High Command and the lieutenant from the legal affairs section stepped out of the rear entrance accompanied by two enlisted men. They joined Takuya watching the bonfire while the soldiers ran over toward the garage. Moments later, an engine's roar was heard and a truck rounded the corner of the building and stopped in front of them. The major and the lieutenant jumped up into the cab while Takuya and his sergeant-major clambered onto the deck. A number of soldiers were already sitting on the deck holding shovels, picks and coils of rope.

The truck moved off. Takuya sat down on a coil of rope and looked at the charred ruins of the city from under the rolled-up canvas hood. Reports released in the days that followed would state that nine hundred fifty-three people had been killed in raids on Fukuoka, and over fourteen thousand homes destroyed. Over two thousand people had been killed in both Kagoshima and Yawata and more than twenty thousand in Nagasaki, with the estimated death toll from air raids on all eighteen cities in Kyushu being close to forty thousand. The execution of a mere seventeen prisoners, he thought, would hardly temper the outrage caused by the deaths of so many defenseless civilians in the fire raids.

The truck moved past piles of rubble and burnt roofing iron that seemed almost to quiver in the hot haze. Takuya stared at the clouds of dust billowing behind the truck as it rumbled forward. The engine raced as the truck began climbing the winding road up the hill. Before long the grassy slopes on either side of the road gave way to forest, with branches of trees brushing noisily against the sides of the canvas hood.

Moments after the truck came out onto a flat stretch of road, it pulled over to one side, close against the face of the hill. Takuya jumped down off the truck's rear deck and saw that another two trucks and a smaller, khaki-colored vehicle had arrived before them. A sergeant standing on the road saluted Takuya and pointed to their left in the direction of a bamboo grove.

Takuya and the others stepped off the road down onto the raised walkway between two areas of paddy fields. Frogs launched themselves into the still water as the men thudded down onto the path. Within seconds Takuya and his comrades had left the track and were walking through the dense thicket of bamboo beyond the paddy fields. Mosquitoes buzzed everywhere and Takuya waved his hand busily from side to side to keep them away from

his face.

When they emerged into a small clearing he saw some officers and enlisted men from headquarters. The prisoners, blindfolded with strips of black cloth tied around their heads, were sitting huddled on the grass. Takuya went over to them.

To a man, the prisoners sat dejectedly with their heads hung forward. One was mumbling what might have been prayers, and another, a very large man, was straining so hard against the rope around his wrists that he was almost toppling over.
Takuya noticed a group of officers from headquarters standing off to one side, a purplish grey plume of cigarette smoke drifting straight up in the still air. When Takuya pulled out one of his cigarettes and lighted it with a match, a few other officers stepped over to him and lit theirs from the flame. Puffing on his cigarette, Takuya stood gazing at the huddle of prisoners. The shrill chirring of what seemed like thousands of cicadas in the undergrowth around the small grassy clearing had reached a crescendo, intense as a summer cloudburst. The sickly sweet smell of wet grass hung in the air and the whirring of insect wings could be heard close by.

“Shall we get it over with?” said the major, throwing his cigarette into the grass and turning toward Takuya.

Almost as though they had been waiting for him to issue the order, two enlisted men stepped forward and pulled a young blond prisoner to his feet. The American dwarfed the soldiers on each side of him.

They pulled him forward, but with legs obviously weakened from his time in captivity, he moved uncertainly over the grass. The major followed, and the four men soon disappeared into the forest.

Takuya stood smoking his cigarette, as though mesmerized by the noise of the cicadas. The glossy dark green leaves of the trees glistened in the sunlight. As Takuya stared in the direction where the four men had gone, he felt sweat trickling down the small of his back.

Before long he notice some movement between the trees. The major appeared, sword in hand, followed by the two enlisted men. The major’s face was expressionless except for a faint hint of a smile at the corner of his mouth.

Another prisoner was dragged to his feet, a big, red-bearded man with a remarkably pointed nose. As soon as Takuya laid eyes on that muscular frame he instinctively stepped forward. He’d thought that this man had been executed long ago, but there was no mistaking it, this was one of the fliers who during the interrogations casually replied that the bomber crews relaxed by listening to jazz on the radio on the way back to base. The man was held on both sides by the two soldiers and led off toward the path into the woods. Takuya followed close behind. He could almost feel the eyes of the other officers and men burning into his back. It doesn’t have to be perfect, he told himself. As long as I can end this man’s days.

The prisoner was led off along a narrow track through the vegetation. Takuya gazed fixedly at the man’s thick neck muscles as he walked into the forest. [5]

Posted on February 25, 2005.

Notes

[1] The Doolittle Raid of 18 April, 1942.
[2] The Japanese approach to captured airmen was to withhold POW status from those involved in the bombing of civilians and to treat them as war criminals.

[3] The Battle of Okinawa claimed the lives of between one quarter and one third of the civilian population. The role of the IJA in abusing Okinawans and coercing them to take their own lives rather than be captured has greatly contributed to postwar ill-feeling towards mainland Japan. See: Hein L. and Selden M.: Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power, Inagaki Takeshi. Okinawa: higu no sakusen [Okinawa: a strategy of tragedy].(Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1984) and Appleman, Roy E., et al. Okinawa: The Last Battle. U.S. Army in World War II, 1948. (Reprint. Washington, DC: Historical Division, Department of the Army, 1971.)

[4] Joe O'Donnell, Japan 1945. A U.S. Marine's Photographs from Ground Zero documents the destruction and early stages of reconstruction in Fukuoka, permitting comparison with Hiroshima and Nagasaki in photographs taken in fall 1945 and early spring 1946 (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005).

[5] See transcriptions of the interrogations of Japanese military involved in the execution of American flyers in Fukuoka.