

That Unforgettable Day--The Great Tokyo Air Raid through Drawings あの日を忘れない・描かれた東京大空襲

Sumida Local Cultural Research Center of Taize

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Sumida Local Culture Resource Center (墨田郷土文化資料館)

Translation by Bret Fisk

The following paintings depicting the Great Tokyo Air Raid of March 10, 1945 were featured in a special exhibit hosted by the Sumida Local Culture Resource Center (墨田郷土文化資料館) in 2004. The Center staff originally settled on the idea of collecting amateur and professional artwork as a unique way of contributing to the preservation of the public memory regarding the March 10 incendiary air raid. Each painting is accompanied by a short explanatory text written by the artist. As well as giving insight into the particular scene depicted in the painting, these explanations generally touch on the artist's overall air raid experience. We appreciate the permission provided by the Sumida Local Culture Resource Center to feature the paintings here. The paintings were published as part of a greater collection in 2005 as *That Unforgettable Day--The Great Tokyo Air Raid Through Drawings* (Japanese title: あの日を忘れない・描かれた東京大空襲).

Head Editor: Kimura Toshiko. **Editors:** Tanaka Yoshiaki, Sueki Yoriko, Aoki Toshiro, Ogawa Shigenori, Yoshikawa Katsuyo, Takahashi Toshie, Tsuchiya Naotsugu



Watching Tokyo on March 10 from our Evacuation Home in Ibaraki Prefecture

Artist: Hashimoto Kimisuke

Location: Yoshinuma (Tsukubane City), Ibaraki Prefecture

Age at time of raid: 7

During the early part of 1944, I went with my family to live with my mother's relatives in Yoshinuma. My father and his younger sisters stayed in Tokyo. I was a first grader in elementary school at the time of the raid. I painted this picture because I've never been able to forget the sight of the B-29s illuminated by the red skies above Tokyo. There are about fifty kilometers between Tokyo and Yoshinuma, but we could clearly see the light reflected off the airplanes as the fires burned the night sky. My mother worried about my father's safety—as well as that of her younger brother who was fighting in New Guinea. My older

sister, brother and I worried too. My one-year-old brother didn't understand what was happening, but he was there too. So were our neighbors. All we could do was stand there and watch. Fortunately, my father and aunts were safe, but my mother's brother never did come home from the war. My mother waited for him, but we found out that he'd died in November of 1944. My mother lived to be 95. She passed away in 2003.



The Mukojima area in Flames

Artist: Katsumi Hidesaburo

Location: Yotsugi Station

Age at time of raid: 16

I lived in Katsushika Ward, Hondenshibue-cho at the time. We heard the sound of anti-aircraft guns early in the morning of March 10. We could see the B-29s flying low overhead and the Kameido area was already engulfed in flames. I went to Yotsugi Station to the west of my house and this is what I could see on the opposite shore. The B-29s were already leaving and the entire opposite side of the river was burning. I think the building in the center is the Shiseido chemical factory. I watched it explode. On the right, you can see the Kanebo factory in Kanagafuchi burning as well.



A Scorched Baby Blown to my Feet

Artist: Yamashita Seiko

Location: Between Kameido and Kinshicho

Age at time of raid: 21

I was a teacher at the Girls' Commercial School in front of Kameido Station in those days. I was staying at the school on the night of March ninth and tenth. We heard a warning from the air raid siren and suddenly we were surrounded by a sea of flames.

I put on my gaiters, boots and an overcoat. I also wrapped a blanket around my head before running out into the flames carrying some of the school's important documents. The wind outside was fierce. In the midst of all the flames, an infant covered with burns and looking like a rubber doll came tumbling by and hit me in the foot. It then kept tumbling on to the rear.

A wooden telephone pole had fallen over and was on fire. Because it blocked my path, I headed for the area in front of Kinshicho Station instead and found room in a bomb shelter on the way. There was an elderly couple inside the shelter. Eventually, the sound of the bomber engines died away and I got out of the shelter. When I glanced at the couple, I saw that they had died in each other's arms.



My Family—Trying to Escape the Flames

Artist: Miyairi Keijiro

Location: Shibazaki-cho, Asakusa Ward

Age at time of raid: 8

Our family lived in Asakusa (Shibazaki 1-3) at the time of the March 10 raid. We initially took shelter in a dugout under our floor, but as the fires grew closer we decided to escape to an area where all the buildings had been removed to create a firebreak.

I painted this from memories of my family searching for safety among the flames that night. On the far right is my little brother. He was three at the time. My mother is holding his hand and she is also carrying my youngest brother—he was one year old and had the measles that night. My mother was carrying him rather than strapping him to her back for fear that he would catch on fire without her knowing it. I'm on the left and the woman holding my hand was a woman from the neighborhood. I clearly remember the sight of someone's corpse burning at my feet.

Even now, I can't remember this night without offering a prayer.



The Flames of Kototoi Bridge—Memories of Losing my Family

Artist: Kano Teruo

Location: Sumida River, Kototoi Bridge (Asakusa side)

Age at time of raid: 14

On March 10, we fled from our home in Asakusa Ward's Senzoku-cho to Sumida Park near the Kototoi Bridge. The park was a chaotic crowd of jostling people, and I got separated from my family. I jumped into the river because the sparks flying through the air made it so hot that I was having trouble breathing. I was able to wedge myself between the stones of one of the bridge's supporting pillars. From there I could look up at the flames on the bridge above me and see people stuck on the railing. Every now and again red hot sheets of corrugated tinsplate would fly off into the river.

With dawn, those of us who had survived under

the bridge gathered. There were about twenty of us left. Everyone else had either burned to death or drowned.

I lost six family members that night, but my troubles were only beginning. I was discriminated against for decades as a war orphan and was forced to live at the lowest levels of society. I don't even know who to blame for it. I just pray that those who haven't experienced war will never have to go through that hell themselves.



The Umay Bridge on the Night of March 10

Artist: Fukushima Yasusuke

Location: Umay Bridge

Age at time of raid: 6

I lived in the Kikuyabashi area of Asakusa. During the raid of March 10, my grandmother and I ran around in the flames like rats. Each time I would almost lose consciousness from the intense heat of the wind, my grandmother would call out my name as loud as she could. I remember looking up and seeing a train on fire.

The painting is like a scene from hell and shows people being lifted up with the explosion of an

incendiary cluster that failed to separate until impact. My grandmother and I huddled at the base of the railing to the Umay Bridge and survived by patting out the sparks that landed on us. I can still remember the maniacal scream of a mother who realized she had lost sight of her child and disappeared in a dash back into the flames.

The next day, I led my grandmother through the piles of charcoal corpses and burning rubbish because her eyes were so sore from the heat. We eventually made it to the house of some relatives in Mejiro. It was three days before we were reunited with my father, who had been working the nightshift, and my mother, who had escaped to Ueno after staying behind and attempting to fight the flames.



The City Burned Long Ago—As If We Were Vermin

Artist: Kawai Mitsuru

Location: Honjo Ward

Age at time of raid: 12

We were a family of six living at Higashi Ryogoku 3-40, Honjo Ward.

During the early hours of the night, my father

led us through streets with flames bursting out of the windows of the buildings on both sides. We got as far as the Chitose Bridge. We were pushed back against the railing by crowds of people as a hail of sparks assailed us.

Soon after this, we took shelter near one end of the bridge—a single step up on the sidewalk. The hot winds blew over the bridge and upset my mother’s hair. Sparks would ignite into flames each time they landed on us children. My mother knelt there and beat them out for us. By morning, my mother had lost her eyesight, my sister’s leg was burnt, and the hand I had been using to cover my face was covered with blisters.

After leaving us there on the sidewalk, my father had gone back into the flames to search for an acquaintance. We never saw him again. There had been forty or fifty people on the bridge, but in the morning most of them were dead. Only a handful had survived like us.



“My Child”

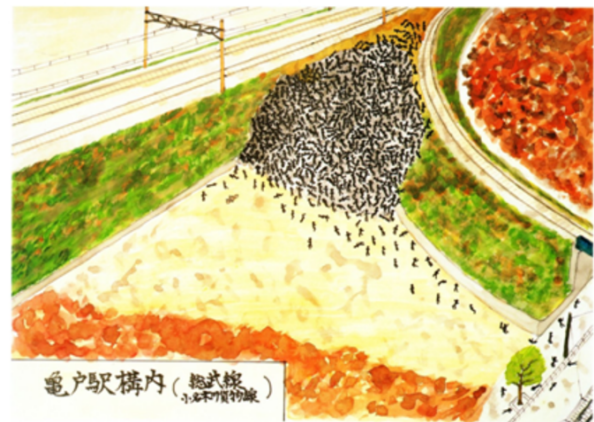
Artist: Miyamoto Kenzo

Location: Ohisa-cho, Arakawa Ward

Age at time of raid: 12

It was an ocean of fire. My mother held my hand as we entered the chaotic stream of

refugees and headed for the Arakawa embankment. This painting is of something I saw on the way and have never been able to forget. A pregnant woman was standing there like a ghost; at her feet was a child of perhaps three or four years. The child wasn’t moving at all. The way they were lit up by the flames around them—it was a sight I saw at twelve that was so horrifying I’ll never be able to forget it.



Near Kameido Station—Corpses of Those Who Died Trying to Climb the Embankment

Artist: Tsuchida Hiroshi

Location: Kameido (March 12, 1945)

Age at time of raid: 13

We lived at Azuma-cho Nishi 4-53, Mukojima (now: Kyojima, Sumida Ward). Two days after the March 10 raid, I walked around looking at the damage. The painting shows what I saw on the embankment near the junction of the Sobu and Onagigawa freight lines. It was a mountain made of several hundred burned corpses. I never want to see such a sight again.

“Why do ordinary citizens have to suffer like this? Are we really going to win the war?” That’s what went through my mind as a child.

I think these people had been unable to completely escape the flames that engulfed them as they tried to run up the embankment. They probably died in an instant.



Kotobashi Bridge—The Horrors at Dawn

Artist: Habe Gonshiro

Location: Honjo Ward, Kotobashi

Age at time of raid: 13

My family lived in Kamezawa, Honjo Ward. During the early hours of March 10, my father and I headed for the Kotobashi Bridge east of our house. However, the bridge was covered with refugees. After passing over it we continued to the junior high school on the other side (now Ryogoku High School). We spent the rest of the night there in the schoolyard.

This is what I saw the next morning at about six o'clock when we tried to get back to our house. The bridge that we had so recently been on was covered with what must have been hundreds of bodies. Blackened corpses, half-burnt bodies that looked like clay figures.... Among the lumber floating in the river below there were even more corpses that had drowned without burning. Looking underneath the ends of the bridge, I could see other mountains of bodies. There was white and black smoke rising all around us. It was like the sun was shining

through cloudy glass. I passed over the bridge in shock.

There was nothing left standing in the spot where we should have found our house.



Temporary Internment of Corpses at Hara Park

Artist: Tsuchida Hiroshi

Location: Hara Park (in present day Kyojima, Sumida Ward)

Age at time of raid: 13

It was a few days after the March 10 raid. At the small park near my house a simple fence had been erected to help conceal what was happening inside—the internment of bodies brought from all over the area. The fence was so full of holes that you could see everything taking place anyway. There was a horrible smell everywhere. Our house was about fifty meters away, but the smell was so strong that we couldn't even eat.

Trucks would carry the bodies in and they would be placed in a large pit that had been roughly dug for that purpose. There was another smaller pit that had been dug in the sandbox. Some of the bodies were burnt. Some were unscathed. There were adults and children. I later checked the records and

learned that 364 people were temporarily interned in the park. All of them had been inhabitants of the surrounding neighborhoods.

After the war, the bodies were exhumed and cremated. The ashes were transferred to urns and housed inside Memorial Hall at Yokoami Park.

Bret Fisk is a translator and director of an English conversation school living in Odawara, Kanagawa prefecture, Japan. With Cary Karacas he is the co-creator of JapanAirRaids.org, a bilingual digital archive.

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See the following articles included in this special issue:

That Unforgettable Day--The Great Tokyo Air Raid through Drawings あの日を忘れない・描かれた東京大空襲

Bret Fisk, The Tokyo Air Raids in the Words of

Those Who Survived 被災者が語る東京空襲

Yamabe Masahiko, Thinking Now about the Great Tokyo Air Raid 今、東京大空襲を考える

Cary Karacas, Fire Bombings and Forgotten Civilians: The Lawsuit Seeking Compensation for Victims of the Tokyo Air Raids 焼夷弾空襲と忘れられた被災市民ー東京大空襲犠牲者による損害賠償請求訴訟

Articles on relevant subjects include:

[Robert Jacobs](#), 24 Hours After Hiroshima: National Geographic Channel Takes Up the Bomb

[Asahi Shimbun](#), The Great Tokyo Air Raid and the Bombing of Civilians in World War II

[Yuki Tanaka and Richard Falk](#), The Atomic Bombing, The Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal and the Shimoda Case: Lessons for Anti-Nuclear Legal Movements

[Marilyn B. Young](#), Bombing Civilians: An American Tradition

[Mark Selden](#), A Forgotten Holocaust: US Bombing Strategy, the Destruction of Japanese Cities and the American Way of War from World War II to Iraq

[Yuki Tanaka](#), Indiscriminate Bombing and the Enola Gay Legacy