

Lucky You

Toshio Miyachi

● Life in those days

I was born in 1917 in Nakanosho Village, Mitsugi County (present-day Innoshima-Nakanosho-cho, Onomichi City). While my father worked for Nakanosho Post Office, my mother, a full-time housewife, farmed a small crop field. Two years after I was born as the eldest brother following three sisters, my younger brother was born. My younger sister died in 1924, shortly after she was born. After that, my mother also passed away. Since then, I lived alone with my father.

In 1939, I was drafted and assigned to the 5th Division, Field Artillery, 5th Regiment. As a squad leader, I moved from place to place in Vietnam and China for three years. After retiring, I worked at the Hikari Branch of Marukashi Department Store that was run by my cousin. In 1943, I changed jobs and worked at the Hikari Branch office of Miyaji Steel Manufacturing Co. that was run by my paternal grandfather. The reason for changing jobs was that the location of the new company's headquarters was closer to my father's place, which I thought would be convenient for taking care of him. I got married around the time I changed jobs. My eldest son was born in April 1944.

In April 1945, I received draft papers for the second time. This time, I evacuated my wife and child to Innoshima. I was assigned again to Field Artillery, 5th Regiment, but this time I worked for the regimental headquarters as a military register keeper. With the main troops being dispatched to various places across the country to defend the mainland, the number of soldiers who stayed at headquarters was very limited. Among those soldiers, my main tasks as a military register keeper were to create a military register and distribute military pocketbooks. I didn't even have to undergo military maneuvers.

Sergeant Okada, my superior officer, who came from Kobatake Village, Jinseki County (present-day Jinsekikogen-cho Jinseki County), was an outstanding man. Because just the two of us worked in the same room, he favored me very much.

In June 1945, the name of my troops was changed to the Chugoku Military District Artillery Reserves (Chugoku 111st Unit). The unit was on the west side of Hiroshima Castle. Several two-story military barracks were built to surround the moat where four batteries had been stationed.

● Situation before the A-bombing

After being discharged from the military, I intended to return to work at my previous office. My company also seemed to be planning the same for me. A letter from the president was delivered to the battery to convey a message asking me if I

could visit Hikari City to attend an important meeting. However, I felt too constrained to ask for permission to go out, hating to be judged by my comrade that I had left my station on the pretext of business because my previous workplace was run by my relatives. While I was wavering, it was very considerate of Sergeant Okada to say, “Don’t worry. I’ll get the permission for you.” Thanks to him, permission to go out was specially issued, and I was in Hikari City on August 5 (Sunday). The permission included the condition that I would catch a train scheduled to arrive at Hiroshima Station at 9:00 the next morning, August 6 (Monday) and return to my unit.

On August 6, I was up at 4:00 in the morning and caught a train from Hikari Station after breakfast. At 8:15, the time of the A-bombing, I believe my train was around the area just before Iwakuni Station. Since I could hardly hear any sound outside due to the tremendous roar of the train, I didn’t hear the sound of the explosion. But all the passengers were looking up through windows on the right (in the train direction) saying, “A huge cloud of smoke like an advertising balloon was rising in the sky of Hiroshima.” Without any announcement, while nobody knew what was going on, my train kept on going until it suddenly stopped at Itsukaichi Station. At that station, with previous trains also stopping, all the passengers were instructed to get off the train because we couldn’t go any farther in the direction of Hiroshima. I was at a loss because I had promised to return to the unit as soon as I arrived at Hiroshima at 9:00.

In front of Itsukaichi Station, with black smoke belching out of a locomotive, it had become as dark as night so much that I could barely sense people moving. After a while, as the black smoke started clearing, I realized that a military police truck was parked nearby. They seemed to have just finished with some kind of business, and when I asked them to drive me to Hiroshima Castle in the hope of returning to my unit, they readily agreed. They were a party of two, a corporal and a sergeant. Looking very energetic without any external wounds, they wouldn’t have been directly exposed to the A-bomb radiation. If they’re still alive today, I’d like to express my gratitude to them in person.

● **Situation in the city after the A-bombing**

Although I don’t remember exactly which route they took from Itsukaichi to Hiroshima, I think they drove on a direct road running through some rice paddies. Along the road was a flow of evacuees hurriedly escaping from the disaster. After entering Hiroshima City, they drove along the tram street. It seemed that everyone

had already been evacuated. The city looked deserted. We didn't even see any dogs or cats.

Although I previously asked them to drive me to Hiroshima Castle, they dropped me off just before the Aioi Bridge. My unit was within a stone's throw of the bridge, so I thought I could walk there. But actually I couldn't, with the road burning hot. I was wearing laced shoes that had been wrapped up with gaiters, but I couldn't advance even one meter and had to stop at the bridge.

About an hour must have passed while I alternated between advancing 50 cm and going back 50 cm on the Aioi Bridge. Suddenly, heavy rain started falling like needles sticking into my skin. It was black rain, which wet the area like oil was being sprinkled all over it. Yet when I wiped my wet face with my hands, I didn't feel oily at all. With no shelter from the rain on the burned plain, I got soaked to the skin and waited for the rain to let up.

After the rain stopped, there was a sudden change of temperature and it noticeably cooled off like autumn. The heated road had also cooled enough to walk on.

When I arrived at my unit, the barracks were in a pitiful condition. The site of the barracks had been cleared away as if there had been nothing there at all, with all the buildings smashed up, burned to ashes, and washed away with the rain.

Sergeant Okada was on the brink of death, suffering burns all over his body, but still breathing. Since the burns had completely changed his appearance, I didn't recognize him until he talked to me, "Miyachi, lucky you!" I temporarily left, but when I returned to that spot in the evening, I couldn't find Sergeant Okada. He must have been transferred somewhere else.

Although my memory's a bit vague, it might have been immediately after the black rain on August 6 when I met General Shunroku Hata of the 2nd Army Forces Command. I was ordered by an adjutant who was with the general, "You, carry General Hata and cross the Temma River, keeping him from getting wet!" General Hata was a small man. I followed the order to cross the river with the general on my back, but he wasn't heavy at all.

● **Rescue operations**

At the West Parade Ground, approximately 90 soldiers who had survived the A-bombing were assembled. I and the other soldiers were engaged in cremating corpses. A tremendous number of corpses had to be cremated, like 250 one day and 300 the next.

Especially memorable in that operation was two American soldiers who were lying

dead on the steps of Hiroshima Castle. They must have been two POWs from the U.S. forces who were held in a building near Hiroshima Castle in those days.

On August 6, the day of the A-bombing, with nothing to eat I took my 30 men to city hall to get some hard biscuits. At city hall, things went differently from what we expected. We argued with city hall, carrying a chip on our shoulders, and couldn't get any biscuits. That day we had no choice but to drink hot water with sugar in it in an effort to distract us from our hunger. From August 7, we were able to receive rationed rice balls and hard biscuits thanks to activities by rescue parties from outside the city.

Until the end of August, we continued our rescue operations, and slept in the open during that time.

On August 31, an order to disband all units was finally issued. When units disbanded, various supplies that had been stored in military warehouses were distributed to soldiers. I received military uniforms and blankets. Some soldiers who came from rural areas received army horses and rode them home.

On September 1, I got on board a ship from the Port of Itozaki and returned to Innoshima.

● Diseases

About two months after returning to Innoshima, while peeing in a crop field, I was surprised to release approximately 1-*sho* (about 1.8 liters) of brown urine. After that, the brown urine persisted. The next year, I was hospitalized with gastrointestinal problems. I was also later admitted to the hospital with liver failure. In 1998, I developed bladder cancer, and have been hospitalized and receiving treatment since then.

In September 1960, I received the A-Bomb Survivor's Health Book Certificate. Before receiving the certificate, I had been wondering whether or not I would accept the certificate and finally decided to get it, taking the advice of the municipal office. Subsequently, whenever I came down with a disease that seemed to be caused by the A-bombing, I felt grateful I had the certificate.

● Life after the war

After the war, I started a small general store on Innoshima. Since it was a countryside general store, we sold not only foods but also polished rice and wheat, purified oil and later dealt with home appliances. It wasn't an easy life, but I managed to put my children through university by juggling expenses.

In 1946, shortly after my eldest daughter was born, the baby and my wife passed

away. After I married my present wife in 1947, two more sons and a daughter were born. Because my children born after the war were all physically weak, I suspected it was due to the influence of my exposure to the A-bomb radiation. My wife seemed to tell our daughter not to mention that she was a second-generation A-bomb victim because her later marriage could be hindered by that fact.

● **Senior officer dies in the A-bombing**

If the war had continued after the A-bombing, Japan would have been in a critical situation. I believe that the current peace is based on many sacrifices.

The fact that I was able to avoid direct exposure to the A-bomb radiation and that I'm still alive today is because of Sergeant Okada's generous decision to get permission for me to go out. I lost track of the sergeant's whereabouts since that August 6 when he said to me, "Miyachi, lucky you." This weighed on my mind for a long time. "I want to convey my deepest appreciation to you, Sergeant." Understanding my hope, my children searched for information on him on the Internet, called various temples one by one asking his whereabouts, and finally found Sergeant Okada's grave for me.

In 2007, I and all my family members visited Sergeant Okada's grave. After paying our respects at his grave and expressing my appreciation to his spirit, I finally felt like a great weight had been lifted off my chest.