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3 May 2021

Japanese Civilians under Japanese Military rule: My Grandfather's Experiences and Reflections

ABSTRACT

Over the past four months, we have learned about the history of countries and the people's lives under the Japanese military before and during World War II. However, one area was under Japanese military rule but was not mentioned much in class. That is Japan. Since I am Japanese, I wanted to use my knowledge of the history of Southeast Asia under Japanese military rule to clarify the situation of Japan under Japanese military rule from an objective point of view in this paper.

Certainly, how the Japanese military treated the Japanese people were not as immoral and cruel as how they treated Southeast Asian people. However, Japan was also under the strong control of the Japanese military. Japanese people also began to live under rationing and gradually suffered from hunger. Furthermore, children were forced to undergo militaristic education to develop imperial subjects loyal to the Showa Emperor. At school, my grandfather stated that if he were late for class, the teacher would slap him in the face with a slipper, and he would always have some bruises. Thus, the Japanese people were also struggling to survive under the Japanese military rule.

In this paper, I interviewed and documented the experiences of my grandfather, who was 12 years old at the beginning of the war and became a volunteer naval soldier at the end of the war. The analysis was done by referring to materials written by people who had similar experiences to my grandfather's and unraveled what life was like back then.

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this paper is to reveal what life was like for Japanese people under Japanese military rule during World War II. Rather than generalize, the focus will be specifically on my grandfather's experiences. I had never asked my grandfather about his wartime experiences in detail before. The war story I remember him telling was, "If the war had lasted one more day, I would have gone on a suicide mission and died." When I heard this story as a child (I do not remember the details of when), I remember feeling that it was a miracle that I exist now. However, years later, as an adult, I began to doubt the authenticity of this story. Because two of my close friends told me almost the same story, they also stated that their grandfather had told them the same story. Hearing this, I began to wonder how such a miraculous story could happen with such high probability. Until now, I had just listened to the stories of those who had experienced the war, feeling that it was not good to doubt what they had to say. However, now I began to feel that I needed to conduct an accurate and in-depth interview and listen to the details of my grandfather's war experience. Given this and the fact that my grandfather was too old to be interviewed in the future, I decided to run an online interview with him, document it, and compile it into a final paper. The analysis of the interviews will be based on books written by my grandfather's naval colleagues and books on Japanese life during the war.

Ultimately, through this research, the state of the people under Japanese military rule in Japan will be revealed. We will gain a better understanding of the reality of Japanese military rule throughout Asia. Sharing this content as a final paper will contribute to the knowledge of others learning about the people under Japanese military rule.

METHOD

I interviewed my maternal grandfather.

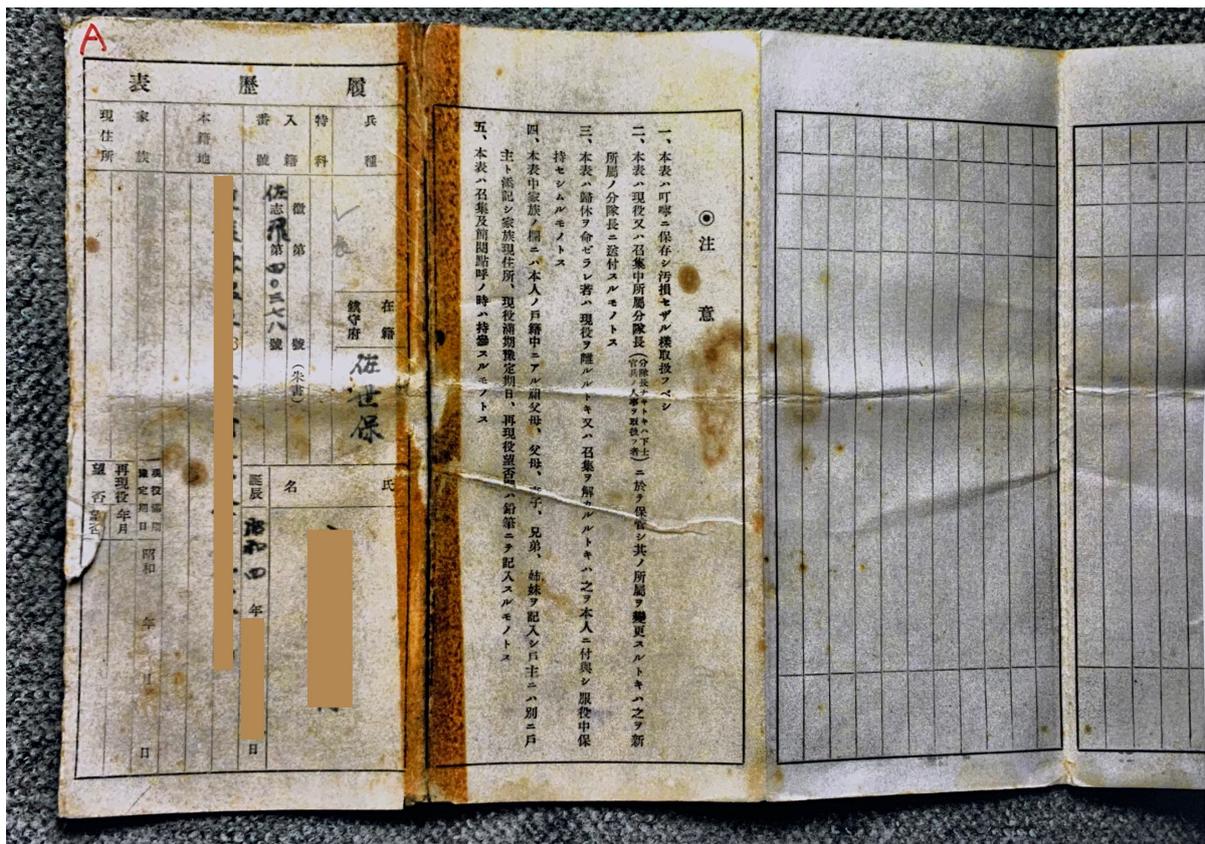
First, here is some basic information about my grandfather. His name is Sunao Toita. He was born in 1929 and is now 92 years old. I am the daughter of Akemi (my mother), born to my grandfather's second wife, Chikami (my grandmother). My grandfather enlisted in the Matsuyama Naval Air Corps on September 15, 1944, as a 15th Class A Flight Prep Trainee when he became 15, the youngest of his class. (I knew that he had joined the Marines before the interview.)



↑ A. History table, ↑ B. Identification, Commemorative photo ↑
 (taken in commemoration of his commission as a Naval Aviator, March 1945)

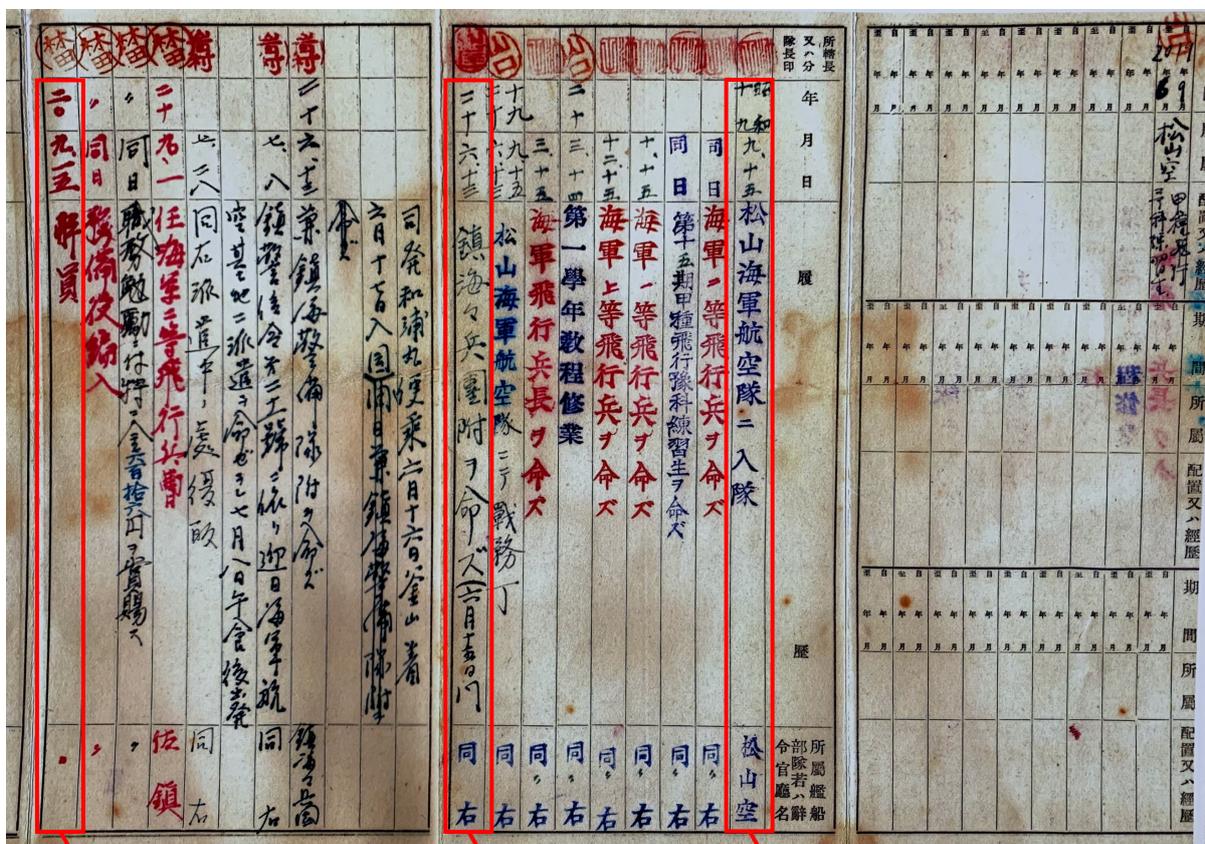


↑ B. Identification



↑ A. History table①

A. History table② ↓



Discharged (15 Sep 1945)

Ordered to be assigned to Chinkai (13 June 1945)

Enlists in Matsuyama Naval Air Station (15 Sep 1944)

We had two interviews. The first one was the primary interview and the second one was a supplementary interview.

The first interview was held on Saturday, March 13, 2021, at 11:00 a.m. using the online meeting app zoom. The interviewer was me, the author of this paper, and the interviewee was my grandfather, Sunao Toita. Since I sometimes do not understand his dialect, I asked my mother to join the interview to translate it into standard Japanese. There were ten people in total listening to the interview. There were my grandfather Sunao, my grandmother, my aunt from Ehime, one cousin from Osaka, one cousin and her husband from Kyoto, one cousin and his wife from Kanagawa, and my mother and myself from Tokyo. Since the 2020 pandemic, it has been a habit for our family to use zoom to talk regularly. So many family members participated in this interview as well.

The questions prepared in advance were as below.

- What was the education at school, and how were you taught about the war?
- Did you hear about the incidents in Southeast Asia or about the surrender of Singapore on the radio?
- What was your impression of Asia at the time?
- What was your experience during the war?
- Why did you volunteer to be a soldier?

Nevertheless, I basically asked him to talk freely about his experiences during the war in chronological order. I asked questions as needed about things I did not understand or wanted to hear more about the details.

The second interview was conducted over the phone. There were three of us, my grandfather, my mother and myself. It lasted about 20 minutes and was about how he came to say, "If the war had lasted one more day, I would have gone on a suicide mission and died."

The next chapter is a transcript of the entire interview, which was recorded and transcribed. The interview was conducted in Japanese. My grandfather spoke in Ehime dialect, and my mother translated parts of it into standard Japanese, and I translated the content into English. Therefore, there is a possibility that what my grandfather actually said and meant and what is written in this paper might be slightly different. Please understand.

In addition, since the first interview included family chit-chat and historical interpretation, I decided not to transcribe them here except for my grandfather's experience.

Finally, I would like to explain the meaning of some words in the interview and the timeline and then move on to the content of the interview.

- Yokaren

This word is an abbreviation for "Naval Flight Training Officers" and its system. After World War I, the demand for aircraft increased worldwide. The former navy, which wanted to keep up with the European powers, started training in 1930 to provide basic training from a young age and raise a large number of highly skilled aircrew. Boys between the ages of 14 and a half and 17 were selected from all over the country by examination and given basic training to become aircrew. During the 15 years, from the start of the preliminary flight training system until the end of the war, about 240,000 people enlisted. Among them, about 24,000 went to the front after passing the flight training course. Many of them flew sorties as part of special attack squadrons, and the number of casualties reached 19,000, 80% of the total.

- Homeland Defense Force

The Homeland Defense Corps was organized by region to defend the homeland of Japan.

- Chinkai Marine Corps

Formed on February 1, 1944. Belonging to the Chinkai Security Office, it educated recruits and defended the Chinkai area on the land.

- Shiden Kai

It is a fighter aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy during World War II. It was the successor to the Zero fighter.

- Grumman

It is a shipboard fighter developed by the Grumman Corporation of the United States and used by the U.S. Navy since the middle of World War II.

- Certificate of Demobilization

Demobilization is the process of restoring the military to its peacetime status and releasing soldiers from the call of duty and the return of soldiers who have been

released from the call of duty. This is a document issued by the mayor of the demobilized area to prove that the soldier has been demobilized.

1929	Born in Matsuyama
December 1941	The Greater East Asia War begins
September 15, 1944	Enlisted in Yokaren, Matsuyama Naval Air Squadron
March 19, 1945	First air raid on Matsuyama, aerial battle with U.S. warplanes
May 4, 1945	Second air raid on Matsuyama
June 13, 1945	Ordered to join the Chinkai Marines (with 500 others)
July 26, 1945	Third air raid on Matsuyama
June 17, 1945	Enlisted in Chinkai Marine Corps
August 15, 1945	End of War
September 15, 1945	Discharged from service

INTERVIEW RESULTS

First Interview

Yuuka: I'd like to ask you about your experiences during the war, but first of all, when you were little, what did you learn about the war in school during world War II?

Grandfather: It's hard to explain such a thing. If you don't know what was going on in Japan 70 years ago, it's hard to understand.

For starters, you need to know what Japan was like in 1944. It is unthinkable in today's world where we have computers, electricity, and running water. There was no tap water in the old days, and in the countryside, there were only three lights per house. When we ate, we had to drag the electrical cord to the dining room, and when we went to bed, we had to drag it to the bedroom. We had a 30-meter long cord that was pulled around the house. The water



supply was from a well. The places that used pumps were good. Water from the well was the standard. Where the well water was clean, we drank it straight from the well. However, in the place where I lived, the water had to be filtered to be drinkable. The first thing we did was to build a filtration system. We had to produce about three layers of filtration systems, and then we stored the water and drank it. It took half an hour to fill up the bath.

In addition, in the old days, when I was a little boy, the toilet was, of course, a pumping toilet. I don't know if rich people had good paper for wiping their butts. But in the countryside, people used to tear off magazines like "Shufu no Tomo" ("Housewife's Friend") and put them in the toilet to wipe their butts.

It was a poor generation around 1945, and you should know that first.

In those days, there was a system of officers assigned to junior high schools since 1925. An officer was responsible for three schools at a time and was higher than the principal. He was always on the lookout for any rebellion or bad ideas.

By the time I went to old engineering school, I was a good student and excelled in school. I could have gone to any school, but I went to an engineering school because I thought it would be better to be close to the school and to have a technical job. I went to the mechanical department. At that time, the mechanical department was the place where the best students gathered. When I went to school, I wore a khaki-colored top and bottom, called "national defense colors." When I was a sophomore, the war had already started around 1943. Everyone wore khaki-colored clothes with gaiters wrapped around their legs and rode the train to school.

Even in elementary school, there was a small temple at the entrance where the Emperor was enshrined. And when you went there in the morning, you had to bow.

Grandmother: We had to salute him.

Grandfather: It was a time when the world was trying to become a wealthy nation with a strong military and not be defeated by the Western powers. This was because Japan won the Sino-Japanese War and made Taiwan a Japanese territory. Then, in 1894, Japan won the Russo-Japanese War again, defeating Russia. And yet, Russia didn't give us any territory. And yet, Russia didn't give us any territory because Russia thought we were stupid. The Russians only gave us a little bit of China's Liaodong Peninsula, which they didn't even provide us with compensation for because they just happened to lose.

Japan was made to look like a fool. Japan was the only country in Asia that was not a colony. You have to understand the historical background.

Western countries were colonizing by propagating Christianity and brainwashing. The Christian missionaries could manipulate the people into believing in Christianity and unifying their consciousness to do their bidding. The Western powers had colonized the Indochina area. Japan was the only country that did not listen to them. Japan was considered to be arrogant and cocky.

This may still be the case, but it was a time when the white man claimed to rule the earth. Non-white people were treated as fools. It's hard to imagine now, but 70 years ago, it was that kind of time, and Japanese people were thought of like insects.

Japan won the Russo-Japanese War, and the world began to take notice. Japan was seen as arrogant and cocky, and Western enumeration clamped down. In the same way that we don't sell goods to Iran or North Korea today, the Western powers stopped selling goods to Japan.

Japan may have overdone it, but the US and UK were preparing to set it off, thinking that Japan was cocky and needed to be beaten. And so the war began.

When I went to school, the officers would come to the stage every day and talk about the war and tell us to do our best to protect our country. Dry rubbing and training were part of the daily routine. Boys were required to do military training at school every day.

There was a baseball class in the first year of junior high school, but it soon disappeared. No ball games at all. So I became the captain of the sumo team. I very strong and won easily. The only sport left were sumo and judo.

Other than that, we had military training for about two hours a day, every day. We trained a march, where we went out to the suburbs and walked. Some teachers told us to volunteer for the Yokaren, but the engineering school teachers did not tell us to do so. This was because most of the junior high school students were sent to support farmers at that time. Since all the successors of the farmers were taken by the war, they could not increase food production. Girls were sent to spinning mills to make all sorts of things. Students from the technical school helped with making shells, finishing parts, and carrying them.

In this way, junior high school students in those days did not fight in the war, but they went to support agriculture and factories. I also studied, but I was too busy to learn.

I took the Yokaren exam in June of 1944. I didn't tell anyone about it. Military songs were popular, and Yuji Furuseki had written a song about the Yokaren, so military songs were played on the radio every day. Because military songs were played so often, everyone somehow got into the mood of war.

Some areas were air raided, but my place was not air raided at that time. Matsuyama, where I lived, was a peaceful place, but The mood of the people was all about the war. Listen to the radio, and you'll hear war stories: "We won in Indochina." "We won in the Philippines." And so on. "We have sudden news to report" "I have breaking news," they said, and the news was all about the victory. That was the mood of the war in the early days.

Anyway, the mood was that one day we would have to go to war. And everyone thought we would win. I thought we would win, but I didn't know we would lose. If we were going to lose, no one would have thought of going, but we were going to win, and since we had won the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, we thought we would win all of them. So I supported the war.

My eldest brother received a call to arms and went into a neighboring prefecture. He was sent to Hachijojima as an artillery soldier. The second brother volunteered and was sent as a mechanic because he was from an engineering school. The third brother went to Kawanishi Aircraft, a factory that made aircraft. I was the only one left in Matsuyama.

Gradually, I felt like I had to go to war too. Then I thought, "Okay, I want to be an airplane pilot." I felt that walking was too hard, but I thought flying would be fun, so I joined the Yokaren. I felt that if I die while flying, it's good because it's an instant. I was such a child that I entered the Yokaren without overthinking about it. I didn't even think that I would be disciplined as soon as I entered. I didn't know that. I didn't know that. (It was tough training.)

Mother: You said you were spanked, right?

Grandfather: That happens all the time. I was spanked with a piece of a black stick. (a stick that holds the windows, so they don't fly out in the wind) I was beaten with a stick to inject military spirit. If one of us was late or did something wrong, we were all punished. There were 24 of us in a squad, and if one of us did something wrong, all 24 of us would be beaten. We all lined up, and one by one, we were slapped on the buttocks about five times, resulting in blue bruises. I couldn't sit down for a couple of days

because my buttocks hurt so much. I told my mother I had a bruise, and when I showed it to her, she cried.

Once, I went out and put some beans in my pocket. And teacher found it and told me to clench my teeth, and slapped me on the face with a leather slipper. I got a bruise that didn't heal for about a week.

Mother: Where was that? in the barracks?

Grandfather: The barracks. The teacher made an example of me in front of everyone. He beat me in the aisle where everyone was watching. He told all to watch.

Anyway, I thought it would be easy, so I joined the Yokaren. No one asked me to do it, but I decided on my own and took it on my own. No one objected when I said I was going to the Yokaren.

War was the norm, and if you objected to it, you were considered unpatriotic.

It was a time of poverty, no telephone, no radio. There was no information, so we had to trust the country. There was no way to know what else was right. I hadn't told any of my friends that I would join Yo Karen. But after the war, I found out that they had, too.

It seems that everyone hadn't talked to anyone about it. Everyone had been sent out without knowing it. That was the mood I was in.

They would make up Yokaren songs and military songs and play them, and everyone would dance, hahaha, "We're going to win, we're going to be brave."

I thought we were going to win, and at first, we did. Because Japan had airplanes. The Americans didn't know about aerial combat. They dismantled the Japanese Zero fighter, examined it, and built a Grumman plane. As they began to mass-produce airplanes, Japan slowly began to lose. Japan probably lost in terms of quantity. American airplanes came with lighter materials and bigger guns. I remember that their planes came to Matsuyama about three times.

At the beginning of 1945, a B-29 flew over us. All I could hear was a buzzing sound. They came to scout with telescopes. Then there were bombings in March and May.

In March 1945, the Grummans were the first to arrive. Fifty Grummans and about ten bombers came, and the Matsuyama Air Force was hit. At that time in March, there was a large Shidenkai squadron in Matsuyama. There was a major named Minoru

Mineta, and we intercepted them with about 50 Shidenkai (the name of a Navy fighter), so we won at that time.

In May, they reassembled and came again. This time there were more of them, but there were no more Shidenkai. All the planes were divided between Kagoshima and Okinawa. Only the fake planes were lined up. But the Americans must have known right away. Hahahahaha.

In March, we fired anti-aircraft guns in an air raid battle. But we couldn't hit a plane flying 10,000 meters above us.

In May, when we fought the Matsuyama Air Force, we were blown to pieces. The barracks I was in were also torn to pieces. So I ran to an air-raid shelter. There was an air raid alarm. Even though it was an air-raid shelter, it was just a hole dug, lined with train sleepers, and covered with red soil. When the Grummans came in March, even the planes' machine guns could only penetrate about 10 cm of soil. That's about the size of a machine gun. But a one-ton bomb is scary, and it made a hole seven or eight meters wide. We had experienced the air raids in March, so we knew that if they came again, we would have to run away this time. The next time, we would have to run for our lives.

We were all sitting in the air-raid shelter, but I had a feeling that if we were in this air-raid shelter, we would be killed in a heartbeat. There was no logic to it. I just had a feeling that it would be dangerous to stay here. I said, "Let's get out of here," but no one answered. Just as I was saying this, a Grumman arrived. I got eye contact with the pilot of the Grumman. "I can't let that guy get me!" I thought. I figured I had about six minutes before the plane came back. He must be coming back because I saw his eyes. So I ran out. I knew the geography, so I ran along the riverbank of a small rocky hill and ran through the river. I ran to another shelter, alone. No one was following me. When I got in there, there were about 20 people in there.

I might have survived whether I escaped or not, but later I realized that the barracks I was in initially were flattened, and there was nothing left.

I think 50 people died in the air raid, and around 30 were unknown. It seems that the bodies of the dead were thrown into bathhouses. When I was in the army, I had to eat fast, shit fast, and run fast. If you are late, you will be beaten, so that's all I was trained to do. But that's how I survived the air raids. Hahaha!

The Matsuyama Air Force was hit in the bombing in May. There used to be barracks where the real soldiers were and barracks next to it where the Yokaren was studying. All the barracks and units were hit, so we couldn't live there anymore. We

were dispersed to schools in Matsuyama. We rented an auditorium and several floors of the school and slept there. I ran away to Nitta Junior High School and lived there.

One night in May, I slipped out at around 1 a.m. and went home. I couldn't stand it any longer. Because I had a feeling that we were going to lose this war. We had no weapons. All we can do was run. I felt that we would lose this war. I wanted to tell my parents about it. "This war will be lost. We have to be ready for when we lose." My father was surprised, but he gave me a ride back to Nitta Junior High School on his bicycle. Then I went to bed pretending that nothing had happened. I'm glad they didn't find me. I did a scary thing, hahaha.

I was sent to Korea in the middle of June. In the morning, we lined up on the ground of Nitta Junior High School. The commander ordered that confident swimmers from among the Yokaren stayed in Nitta Junior High School should stand to the right. I was not a bad swimmer, but I didn't want to swim in the cold sea, so I didn't stand to the right. The ones who didn't were sent to Korea. The ones that got out became the Homeland Defense Forces all over Shikoku.

On September 15, 1944, about 3,000 men enlisted in the 15th term, and about 500 of them went to Korea on June 13. I went to Kure first. I got on a ship from Mitsuhamma. On June 13, we took a ship from Mitsuhamma to Kure, standing on the deck.

Before that, we were allowed to go out on June 10. I guess that was the last time we had to say goodbye. We were allowed to go out for half a day and went home. For those who didn't have a home, there was a lodging house where they could meet. I heard that my house was also offered as a visiting place. At that time, I told my mother about my trip to Korea. So on the day of my departure, my mother came to see me off. I didn't know my mother was there because there were so many people. I found out later when I heard about it.



Anyway, we went to Kure. And we stayed there for the night and then got on a train with the rest of the troops. We took the night train at about 9 or 10 o'clock to Monji, and all 500 of us went on an army transport ship. We were told to be careful because the transports had been targeted before. To avoid drowning, we made holes

from one section of bamboo to the next, put six of them on our bodies as floating bags, and stood on the deck for a long time. I couldn't sleep.

When we got there, we took the train to Chinkai. There were Marines in Chinkai. There was a dormitory for a squad of Marines. It was called the Triangle Barracks at the foot of the mountain. It's just for sleeping.

When we woke up in the morning, we lined up and went to the Marine Corps in Chinkai to carry the cannonballs to the anti-aircraft gun position, where we had to carry the balls in a box on our backs. We dug a hole in the middle of the road so that we can hide when enemy tanks came. When the tank comes, you move the lid off, put a bomb on the bottom of the tank, attach it, cover the hole, and wait for it to explode. I didn't know if it works, but we need to make them. That was my daily routine.

I went to Chinkai, but about 200 of us were ordered on July 8 and sent to Geijitsu Naval Air Base, where we were put on a train for about 100 yen and transferred by freight train to an airfield up in the mountains. I went to guard the airport there from July 8. And although the record says July 28, I actually stayed until the end of August. I was sent to a suicide attack base at the airfield, and my job was to guard it. During the day, I dug holes and such, but my main work was at night. I was told to load five live bullets and say "Somebody, somebody, somebody" three times, and if I didn't get a response, I was allowed to shoot. I was told that if I didn't get an answer, I could shoot him, but I never did.

I arrived in Korea on June 13 or 14 and was only in Korea for about two and a half months, July and August. In fact, I was there until September 15, when I was dismissed. On September 15, I was discharged from my position because we lost the war. I returned to Japan on that day. I returned to Hakata. This time I thought I would go from Hakata to Beppu and then from Beppu to Yawatahama by boat, but there was a cliffhanger at Kaminada. I was told that there was no train even if I crossed Yawatahama. So I waited for about a week at an inn in Beppu. In the end, we received no information. I traveled to Yawatahama without any information. I had a demobilization certificate, so the train was free of charge. I had to pay for the hotel. When I was dismissed from Yokaren, I was given 613 yen. With that money, I paid for the hotel, two or three yen per night. In those days, I could buy a house for 600 yen. That means I had such a large sum of money. Those who stayed in Japan and were assigned to Uwajima received 1,000 yen. Those who went to Korea lost a lot of money because it was 600 yen. It was hard work, but it was fun.

Mother: Didn't you know the war ended until September?

Grandfather: It was the end of August when I was told. I later learned that the end of the war was August 15. My superiors knew, but they put it off because I didn't have a family, and there was no rush to get home. All the higher-ups and those with families ran off and left first. The single Yokaren, preppers, were left behind. Of course, some of the people in charge, the corporal sergeants, stayed behind. No chief, though. the rest of us were put to work sorting out the rest of the work, checking how many blankets and how many guns we had, and then handing them over to the Americans.

I didn't know that Japan had lost until about August 20, after everyone had fled and returned home.

Second Interview

Yuuka: I would like to ask you a few more questions. I didn't ask you much about suicide missions when I interviewed you the other day. Did you ever volunteer for a suicide mission? Did you have a chance to volunteer for a suicide mission?

Grandfather: No, not at all. When I joined the Marines, there were no more planes. If I had joined the Corps six months before, I would have been on a suicide mission. In my time, there were no more airplanes, so I couldn't go on a suicide mission.

Yuuka: You were talking about going on a suicide mission by ship before, weren't you?

Grandfather: It's the Homeland Defense Force that goes by ship. They were considered to have to fight until the very end. My squadmates were dispatched to areas like Uwajima and Komatsu in Shikoku. They trained to load bombs onto plywood boats and sneak out in the middle of the night to crash into enemy ships and detonate them.

Mother: It's like a suicide mission, isn't it?

Grandfather: Yes, they practiced, but they didn't go through with it. Just preparing for it.

Mother: But it's good it was just preparation.

Grandfather: They were prepared, but I don't think it would have worked if they had gone to attack. It would have destroyed before they could get to the enemy ship. A plywood ship would have cracked and broken. haha

Yuuka: Still, they had to do something, so they practiced.

Grandfather: We were practicing because we had to defend our country to the end, and the enemy might come to our home country. All the young people had gone to war, and the only people left in Shikoku were grandfathers, grandmothers, and children. That's why young people from the Yokaren were assigned to various places.

Mother: When push came to shove, they had to get on that battered ship and go on the offensive, right?

Grandfather: My comrades said they were training to get on a ship and attack. After the war, we, Yokaren, got together and talked about it year after year, but they didn't get any good training, they said. The idea was there, but it was never put to use.

Yuuka: Grandpa was in Korea when your comrades were practicing that kind of thing, right?

Grandfather: I was in Korea, so I did not have that training. I was asked if I was a good swimmer, and I was, but I said not a good swimmer because I didn't want to swim in the cold, so they sent me to Korea instead of a base on the ocean side of Shikoku. If I had answered that I was a good swimmer, I would have been sent to Kochi Prefecture or Uwajima to become a member of the Homeland Defense Force. I went to Korea and became a guard at a suicide attack base. I was patrolling at night.

Yuuka: Didn't you have any training to go on an attack somewhere?

Grandfather: No, we did not. At the time of your grandfather, there were no more planes, so we couldn't do anything. We just supported.

Yuuka: Were all the people who were with grandpa about the same age as you?

Grandfather: There was a three-year age difference, and they were all 15, 16, and 17 years old. And Grandpa was 15. Grandpa was in the third year of junior high school. In the old days, junior high school was five years long. Those who applied in the third, fourth, or fifth year of junior high school were placed in the same unit. That's why there were three different ages, and Grandpa was the youngest.

Yuuka: I see. Thank you.

Grandfather: Young people over the age of 18 went to the army, were taken away, and went to Southeast Asia or China. The only ones left were grandmothers, women, and children. Even though we were defending the homeland, we didn't know where the American soldiers would land, so we had Yokaren all over the country. They didn't have many guns, but they did have gun batteries, so the only thing we had to do was carry balls. Even so, we trained after moving the balls. The war was over before we could do any real training. That's why we couldn't use the ships for assault.

Grandfather: Planes were flying from the suicide airbase to Okinawa and back to the south. and I was the guard at the airfield there.

Yuuka: Okay, thank you.

Grandfather: After the war, I was given a book about the Yokaren training (cost about 50,000 yen). And after reading it, I found out that my 15th squadron was not supposed to fly from the beginning.

Mother: You said you were deceived, didn't you, Grandpa?

Grandfather: They didn't tell us that we would be sent to homeland defense, but they gathered people by saying that we could become airplane pilots. They had no intention of letting us become airplane pilots. They were training them to be sent to homeland defense.

Yuuka: I often hear people say that their grandfathers told them that if the war had lasted one more day, they would have gone on a suicide mission. From you too.

Grandfather: Well, I don't think it would have been "one more day." But maybe a few months.

Mother: So you were being extreme when you said one day.

Grandfather: Because It would be more interesting to say that it was only one day away. Haha. I guess I wanted to say that I might have been going "soon." When I look back on the past, a couple of months means a day of the experience.

People who had joined the squad six months before I had gone on suicide missions. When I was eating dinner alone in the dormitory in Korea, one of my seniors came up to me and asked, "Where are you from?" I answered, "Matsuyama." and he said, "I'm from Matsuyama too." He was from Yanai Town. He said, "I'm going on a suicide mission tomorrow." So I said, "I see, good luck with that."

Yuuka: Was he the same age as grandpa?

Grandfather: He was much older. I was the youngest, so when I asked him, he said he was 17 or 18. In short, if I had joined the army six months differently, I might have gone on a suicide mission. A difference of six months is like a difference of one day.

M- Looking back now, a day and six months are the same things.

Grandfather: If things had gone a little different, I might have ended up on a suicide mission.

Yuuka: I see.

Grandfather: Some guys enlisted at the same time as me, who was 18 years old. But if he had decided to join the Yokaren six months earlier, he would have gone on a suicide mission.

Mother: I see. It's fate.

Grandfather: some didn't enlist when they were 15, but when they were 18, in the fifth year of junior high school, so they didn't die.

The man I met said he was going tomorrow, so he must have gone on a suicide mission. I don't know if he's dead or not because I've never seen him since then.

Yuuka: Were there any people who joined six months ago who were fifteen years old, like grandpa?

Grandfather: If I had turned fifteen six months ago, I would have joined. And I couldn't participate until I turned fifteen because fifteen is the youngest. I don't know. Maybe other kids in the same grade who turned 15 six months ago joined the Yokaren. 15 in January is totally different from 15 in December, even if they're in the same grade. Someone who turns fifteen in January and someone who turns fifteen in December would be in the same grade, but their time to join the corps would be completely different.

Yuuka: I get it.



CONCLUSION

What struck me in this interview was the magnitude of the impact of propaganda on children's thinking and the strength of children at that time. In the interview with my grandfather, the seriousness of the war didn't come through. He seemed to be in a cheerful mood, which was different from what people who were adults at the time of the war would talk. Sometimes it sounded like he was having fun. I found it a bit bizarre. Especially the fact that a 15-year-old boy was willingly participating in the war due to propaganda is extraordinary. I was moved to tears when he said, "if I die while flying, it's good because it's an instant." It must have been a light-hearted thought for him. However, I could feel that the adults were manipulating his thoughts very skillfully. I felt that because children have no evil thoughts and clear thinking, they are quick to act on the ideas instilled in them as their own will.

However, This kind of thing is not only happening in Japan but also in Africa and other war zones. It is known as "child soldiers." Considering how easy it is to inculcate ideas in children, it is heartbreaking to think that this kind of thing will never disappear.

After completing the interview, It also made me realize how important it is to communicate. It seems that most of the voices of those who have experienced war are those who have fought on the front lines or have been to the battlefields. In contrast, the voice of a 15-year-old boy who was the lowest rank in the army has not been listened to as much. Indeed, he was not on a critical mission to influence history. But he was undoubtedly the youngest soldier to go through the war. When I think back on his words, serious or funny, they carry more weight than I ever imagined. Behind those words was a feeling that had been altered by propaganda. I would especially like today's 15-year-olds and high school students to read this interview. By reading about the experiences of people of the same generation during the war, I think they will feel closer to the war stories and be able to put themselves in their shoes and guess, "What if it were me?" I felt that because it was the experience of young people, it would resonate with them.

I also learned that it is essential to be precise and detailed when communicating. When we hear about the war in our daily lives, we may think that we don't want to talk about such a heavy subject and ignore it. However, I felt that if someone has experienced war close to you, you should listen to their entire experience, not just their saga. It is common for people to embellish their stories. During the war, I can't imagine how a moment's difference or a small decision could have made the difference between life and

death. A small difference can make a big difference. I think this is what he meant when he said, "If the war had lasted one more day, I would have gone on a suicide mission and died. Even if there was no possibility of going on a suicide mission in terms of actual numbers, he might have felt that he would have to go someday or that suddenly he might be told to do so. I thought that during wartime, there was always such a sense of crisis. I guess the statement may have been expressing this feeling. If you think about it that way, this statement may not be accurate, but it is not a lie. Each person's way of telling the story of the war will be pretty different. I think it would be exciting to analyze the way different people talk about their war experiences.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Sandeep. I conducted the interview on the advice of Professor Sandeep. Without his guidance, I would have kept putting it off and would not have been able to do it. Thank you very much.

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Photos

- Grandfather's belongings: Used with permission of grandfather.
- Maps: Download from adobe stock