

The Atomic Bomb and the State of Damage Seen at the Public Library

Mr. Ookuma Oda

When I heard the air raid evacuation order on the radio, I led all the people in the library to evacuate to the storage room [a reinforced concrete building]. Soon, the radio broadcast that called off the alert was on so I told everyone to go back to their posts and then went into my office on the second floor, but I could hear a B29 roaring closely by. I thought something was wrong and opened the window to look for it. Then I saw two things that looked like big balloons, floating unsteadily as they fell.

I was looking at them uncertainly and the next moment those two balls became bright red, then before the blink of an eye, one of them became purple - more like a purplish flash. I unconsciously called "It's a new kind of bomb! Duck under the desk!" but I knew there was no time for me to go back to my desk, so I prostrated myself right away there by the window.

The moment I laid down, with the awful tearing sound of explosion I felt about 300 kin [180 kg] over my whole body. I was squashed by a falling object. A few minutes later, I heard Ms. Kumatani who was an accountant, crying "It hurts! It hurts!" The chief librarian was absent because of illness that day and I thought I couldn't simply stay like this until the army came to help us but it was difficult to crawl out from under the 300 kin of weight even though I wanted to rescue her.

I moved my hands and feet gradually and tried to shake the stuff off on my body, and then I noticed my heels were outside the building from the feeling of the outside air on them. I won-

dered how my heels could have been outside the window when I had laid down inside by the window.

I finally crawled out and saw how things were; the roof had been destroyed and I could see the sky. The walls had collapsed and the bookshelves had fallen over, the room was full of books and beams from the roof which had fallen down. There was no space to put my feet and I realized it was a great disaster - just like the *Kanto Daishinsai* (Great Earthquake) of September 1st, 1923.

I caught my breath when I saw Kumatani covered in blood in front of me. I walked on the edges of bookshelves and finally got to her side and told her to go to the storage room. Then I went to get help from an army surgeon. But the library's entrance square was just like a battle field. There were about 300 soldiers there who were covered in blood.

I realized that we couldn't expect any treatment for the civilians so I went to the janitor's room. But the janitor's room was also half destroyed and water pipes there had exploded and the water was blowing up like a fountain. There was nothing I could do. I put a bucket under the water but not even a drop of water went into it. I looked around and put an iron pot over top of the gushing water, and then I was finally able to fill up two buckets of water by collecting the water from underneath the pot. I hurried back to the storage room to treat the injured. Kumatani's bleeding was from cuts on her earlobe she had got from broken glass. I was relieved that it was such a slight injury.

Ms. Koyanagi, who was a cashier, looked really hurt with a badly burned right arm. But there was no medication available so I cleaned it with water over and over then used a wet towel as a bandage, and then the pain went down. I asked Koyanagi

how she got burned. She told me she had been walking down a hallway to serve tea to the teachers because it was close to noon but the blast blew her over and she had gotten burned by the hot water iron kettle she was carrying.

While I was under the fallen debris, I noticed blood in my mouth and felt something like cold blood running down from my left shoulder to my right. So I asked the janitor to wash my back and took my shirt off; it was completely black! Once my shirt was off and cleaned up a bit, low and behold, I realized a big pot of ink had fallen off a shelf and broken and washed all over my back. Everyone was momentarily dumbfounded as we tried to figure out what it was. But it made us smile, at last, once we had figured out what it was.

I was relieved that there were no injuries, except those two previously mentioned, from out of about 30 workers. I was at a loss as to where to start tidying up in each room. There were 4 men but the chief librarian was off sick. We started to tidy up little by little. Anyway, I left for the chief librarian's residence to give a damage report. When I went down to the town, it was a deluge of fire in all directions. The houses and shops on the street were so badly destroyed that I couldn't look at it and fire was raging everywhere. And I thought the flames might scorch my face.

Inside of the half destroyed official residence of the chief librarian, his wife was cleaning their *tatami* mats with a headband on her head. I briefly reported the horrible condition of the library to him and left. I made a promise then, deeply in my heart as I prayed to God, that we must not wage war ever again.