Prime Targets

A sign that the war was finally reaching the homes, fields, schools, and factories of Oita Prefecture came on January 1, 1945, though most people did not notice it at the time. On that day, the first American B-29 bomber flew high over the city of Oita. Only a handful of residents noticed the plane, as it left nothing but a streak of white mist in its path. No alarms went off and the newspapers did not report it the next day. An American reconnaissance plane, surveying the land below and mapping future bombing sites, came and went quietly. But for those who understood what they were seeing, a new and unsettling feeling emerged for the first time since the war began.

Oita Prefecture was a hot spot of Japanese military activity in early 1945, and ripe for attack. The 5th Naval Air Fleet Command Center was located in Oita City. Additionally, the 12th Air Group headquartered at the Oita Naval Air Base and by early 1945 served as home base for hundreds of naval fighter planes, including kamikaze. It was located next to the Oita River and was surrounded by a rural area called East Oita Village. In close proximity to this village had recently been constructed the 12th Naval Air Factory. This facility operated as a repair, maintenance, and manufacture center for the planes based in Oita and Saiki, as well as the nearby naval air commands in Fukuoka and Miyazaki. In neighboring Tsurusaki, Sumitomo Chemical manufactured bombs while Nakashima Industry produced bullets and airplane parts. The factories that made up this munitions and repair industrial center controlled the supply of weapons for bases throughout the region. Most of these manufacturers were controlled tightly by the military and employed forced labor who worked alongside regular employees, including many women.

As the war expanded and more men went off to fight, the lack of a sustainable labor force undermined the military’s frantic need to repel the Allies as they moved closer to Japan. Earlier in the war, the government had decreed that all citizens should contribute to the war effort and instituted the “Student Labor Contribution” aimed at young students. By 1944 the use of student labor was well established. Under this plan, students attending middle school were assigned to factories such as the ones in Oita City. As part of their educational curriculum, students would leave their classrooms to work as unpaid laborers. By the end of 1944, there were 12,000 workers in these factories, including 8,000 student laborers. Oita Middle
School supplied 1,200 student workers. Other schools sending young people to these facilities included Oita Shougyou, Oita Men's Shihan (currently Oita University's Department of Education), Shihan Girls' School, Daiichi Girls' High School, Daini Girls' High School, Tsurusaki Kougyou, Beppu Middle School, Beppu Girls' High School, Hiji Girls' High School, Usuki Middle School, and Takeda Girls' High School. All schools were located in Oita Prefecture, but half were located some distance from the city of Oita. The need was so great that sacrificing education for the war effort went unquestioned by the country's military leaders and was embraced by teachers and their students.

By early 1945 the number of student workers grew to 16,000 boys and girls. As Oita was still a rather sparsely populated rural and fishing prefecture, 945 students from outside Oita were sent there to work. As fewer and fewer adult men were left in the country to work in the factories, the responsibilities of the children expanded. The jobs they undertook included:

- acquisition of materials;
- airplane manufacturing, body maintenance and repair;
- airplane engine manufacturing and repair;
- weapons manufacturing;
- Ration Control Department;
- accounting;
- medical support;
- communications.¹

Seiichi Kogo was a middle school student in 1945 when he left the classroom to work in the military factory.

I entered Oita Middle School, but didn’t study much. The students were practically brainwashed to die for our country and to make other sacrifices. We were treated like soldiers and trained as though we were in the military. By the end of my third year in middle school, we were forced to work in factories due to severe labor shortages. Basically, our school education was finished at that point. My teacher divided students up into groups. I was assigned to the parts shop in the 12th Oita Naval Factory, making parts for the airplanes. There was an air base right next to the factory, and some students were sent to work on the base. Others were sent to torpedo factories, engine factories, and so forth. We’d go straight to the factories every morning to meet up with the teacher and

¹ Hoashi, pp. 58-61.
start working. There were students from many different schools at each factory. In school the boys and girls were always separated, but at the factories we worked side by side.

I was happy then, because I'd always enjoyed science classes and loved making things with my hands, especially technical things. The specialized military technicians in the factory were my role models. I really wanted to become a technician, not just because I loved science. I also knew that technicians wouldn’t have to go to war. I didn’t want to join the military at all.

We worked every day, and my job was to repair the Ichi-shiki planes. The planes would come in damaged during air raids or even during training exercises. We would make parts of the planes by reading the blueprints of the planes and the parts. Back then, machines were not widely available, we often made airplane parts manually. Occasionally, we had a machine that was useful, but overall we just looked at the blueprints and made the parts by hand, a piece at a time. We worked in groups of ten under the direction of a qualified engineer. There were lots of groups; each was instructed to make a specific part.

Hideo Sonoda had a special assignment. He prepared the innovative kami-kaze Oka (“cherry blossom”) aircraft for their one-way mission. Oka were small, one-man kamikaze guided missiles attached to a larger plane, which were dropped close to the intended target.

I worked on the Oka. Metal was scarce, so we made what we could with wood and thin plywood, including the dashboard, measuring tools and what have you. The parts came in all shapes and sizes. After my section cut the pieces and shaped them into appropriate sizes, another section of workers would assemble them according to the planes’ blueprints. We had no machines, so we worked the material by hand, cutting, shaping and so on. On the back of the Oka, there were these antennas. Rocket switches were used to propel the Oka plane when they were released from their mother planes. The Oka flew very low, so that they could ram into the American warships. When an Oka plane was ready for a mission, the bombs and chemicals were placed under the belly of the plane.

Like many other youths from surrounding towns and villages, Kitsuki’s Masaaki Yano was assigned to work in the military industries located 30
kilometers away in Oita City, where he was housed in a dormitory for student workers.

I went to Oita City to work in a factory making gunpowder when I was eighteen. The students were assigned different jobs in making the gunpowder. Mine dealt with nitric acid. The recipes for mixing gunpowder were top secret, so the complex mixture was done by experts. The students were watched closely by soldiers at every moment, so we had to stay conscientious and work diligently. In the end, this was a good thing. Because we were extra vigilant in following the strict rules and procedures, we didn’t have any accidents at our factory.

As the young students began transitioning into the military factories around Oita, American bombers expanded their targets beyond Tokyo, Nagoya, and other major cities. In mid-March, 1945, General Curtis LeMay gained approval to attack cities around the island of Kyushu. This decision was based on the American plan to invade the Japanese territory of Okinawa as the first step to invading Japan proper. Kyushu, which would be the next stop after Okinawa, was home to multiple naval and army air bases and could easily launch attacks on U.S. troops from those southern vantage points. LeMay’s list of priority targets named airfields and factories in the cities of Kanoya, Miyasaki, Tachiarai, Nittagahara, Omura, Oita, and Saiki.3 USA was added to this list as the raids began. The bombings would continue off and on for the rest of the war.

On March 18, a week after the Tokyo Air Raids began, the first bomb was dropped in Oita City, in anticipation of the April 1 scheduled attack on Okinawa. The goal was to attack as many bases in Kyushu as possible, destroying not only enemy planes but also enemy bases and factories, thus severing supply lines for fuel and ammunition.4 There was some indication that this attack was imminent, for a Japanese reconnaissance plane had sighted enemy ships headed for Okinawa on March 14 and reported this to the 5th Naval Air Fleet commanded by Admiral Matome Uragaki, who ordered an attack on the American fleet. All planes in Oita, USA, and other bases around Kyushu were ordered down to southern Kyushu for these attacks. At 3 a.m. on March 18, planes began leaving their

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4 Hoashi, pp. 66-90.
bases to fly south and attack the American ships. It proved a great loss for Japan, because over 200 Japanese planes never made it home. The Americans reported not losing a single ship. Then, as Oita citizens began their day, the Americans took off for targets on Kyushu, with Grumman F6F Hellcat fighter planes and Curtiss SB2C Helldiver bombers targeting several Oita locations.

The Oita air command expected the Americans to strike early in the morning, while it was still dark, so the maintenance and pilot crews scrambled to get their remaining planes out of the hangars and scattered around the base. At 8:30 in the morning, about 30 American planes appeared above Beppu Bay just seconds from Oita. The attacking Grumman fighters and Curtiss bombers approached rapidly and began bombing the hangars and dispersed planes on the ground. The bombs kept falling, causing ear-piercing explosions one after another. The Americans then started attacking the whole base. Those on the ground recalled the eerie, screeching noise of rapid fire. The Grummans were targeting the planes the Japanese had moved from the buildings. Bomb after bomb exploded, leaving planes destroyed and black smoke rising everywhere. Not only had the Americans shot up the buildings, they heavily damaged the runways as well. Because the Japanese had warning of the attack and reacted quickly to get the planes out of the buildings, only five planes were destroyed in the massive raid, with minimal casualties. It was, as one local historian remarked, the best outcome of the worst scenario.5

Although the military escaped major damage that day, those students working in military factories were caught unprepared, for the Americans turned their guns on the areas around the base, including the 12th Naval Air Factory. It was just the first of many bombings and strafing they would endure. Hideo Sonoda, barely a teenager at this time, recalls:

On March 18, 1945, the first air raid struck Oita City, only a week after I had begun working in a military factory. The Grummans attacked the factory where I was working. My friends and I ran outside when the attacks started. On the way to the bomb shelters, the planes flew right at us and started shooting, so we jumped into the river to hide. The bullets were flying just above our heads. The planes flew so close; we could see the pilots’ faces. Then bombs exploded around us. I was fourteen and terrified. That was my first experience in war.

5 Ibid.
Ichiro Hashimoto, another fourteen-year-old student factory worker, recounts his experience that same day and reflects on the events to follow.

I remember that day clearly. When the bombing started, I panicked, trying to run from the city, and a Grumman came after me. It was not a large plane, just a fighter jet with one pilot. There was no bomb shelter around, only the road by the river. It terrified me. Fortunately, I saw a bridge nearby, so I ran and hid under the bridge as he continued shooting at me. After that, there were air raids every day and I grew used to them eventually.

Just as the people feared, the air raids came again the next day, dealing heavy damage to the Oita Naval Air Base, 12th Naval Air Factory, and the areas surrounding eastern Oita. It was not just Oita City, however. Saiki Naval Air Base and Usa Naval Air Base were also attacked. In Usa, they were attacked three times in one day between 13:00 and 15:30, killing fourteen people. Usa was headquarters of the 3rd Squadron of the 721st Special Attack Group, or Tokkotai, a kamikaze operation led by Captain Morimasa Yunokawa. He had a total of 32 men in his unit between the ages of 20 and 24, all volunteers. This unit arrived in Usa in mid-February, preparing for a suicide attack on the American forces approaching Okinawa in the following month.

After arriving in Usa, I spent most of my time simulating battles on maps. We focused on how to disable the American forces in one big blow, hitting their eight largest vessels around Okinawa. We contemplated the probable locations of the ships and tried to formulate the best attacking strategy. This was done indoors, but we'd also train in the air and on the ground. I trained about 200 pilots, two died and one was seriously injured during these training. But the rest of us felt confident in carrying out our mission. Other units that were not kamikaze were also stationed in Usa, and with whom we sometimes socialized, going for drinks in Usa or Beppu. But by mid-March, most of them had been shipped to the front, only one other unit stayed in Usa. My unit was scheduled to depart for our mission on March 18. We had made our visits to Usa Shrine in the weeks leading up to the attack and were prepared, physically and mentally, to fly out that day. On March 18, at 15:30, we were all ready. Our engines were running, we lined up in front of a table, raised our cups to have our “last drink” of sake (in fact, the drink was ceremonial water) when American planes appeared suddenly. The surprise attack was so well executed; I had no time to give orders. Everyone was running around frantically. I watched and thought to myself, we were screwed. I heard the sound of our machine guns up on
the second floor of a nearby building, trying to shoot down the planes. My pilots had scattered all over the place, looking for shelter. There was not much I could do, so I went up to the machine gunner and encouraged him to keep up with the good fight and asked him if he needed anything. He wanted water which I promptly brought to him. Then came a second wave of attacks. I saw the faces of the American pilots and noted their flight scarves. I don't remember what I did immediately after the attacks, but I do remember thinking, "Ah, shit! Damn!" Eleven of our eighteen planes were destroyed. My unit was ordered to regroup in Miyazaki.

Despite the destruction of Captain Yunokawa's unit, kamikaze airmen continued to gather in Usa for the next three months, launching a total of five missions from Usa on April 6, 12, 16, 28, and May 4. A total of 81 kamikaze planes flew from this small coastal town and 154 pilots lost their lives. If one visits Usa today the memory of these 154 men is enshrined in parks, monuments, and museums around the town.

Usa was just a small farming and fishing town, with informal relations between the military and the citizens. Fourteen-year-old Takafumi Yoshimura witnessed the March 18 attack on Usa.

I sure do remember the attack on March 18, 1945. I was playing near the naval air base that day when I looked up in the sky and saw airplanes headed toward me. There were no air raid sirens, so I thought they were Japanese planes. Then the shooting started. The airplanes flew so close that I could even see the pilots, so I started running with all my might. These were the first Grumman planes I saw, but more were to follow. There were about ten of them that day, and they circled back many times. It happened so fast, there was little resistance. I did not see any Japanese planes fly up to meet them.

The American military did not just target the bases and the factories. They wanted to destroy supply lines in order to undermine Japan's defense of Okinawa. On March 18 and 19, trains carrying civilians were attacked, some in small villages. On the 18th, on the Nichibun line, around Kouzaki, a conductor and passenger were killed and many passengers were injured. Then in Satsuki five passengers were killed. On the 19th, one conductor and passenger were killed in Nakahanda and in Usa's Tateishi, one conductor was killed while another was severely injured.^

^Hoashi, pp. 78-79.
Masaaki Yano in Kitsuki recalls one eventful day the Grumman planes flying over his home, the local manor house that sits next to a Buddhist temple and overlooks rice fields and a river. Just beyond the fields stretches the train line snaking down the coast of Kyushu between Kokura and Saiki. “One day the Grummans flew low over the tracks, targeting a train full of people. The train was shot up, with many people dead and injured. Some of those were carried up the hill to the temple, where they were cared for as well as they could be. My family members ran to the train and helped carry the injured to the temple. As attacks on these tracks increased the conductors began making brief stops at the train platforms to decrease the chance of being hit. After the attack on March 19, the sirens went off daily. People lived in fear and grew weary of dwindling supplies and weary of tough conditions.”

Hiji, sandwiched between the air bases of Oita City and Usa, saw the occasional dogfight overhead. While air defense was getting weaker by the day, there was still some fight left in the limited number of Japanese planes and their pilots. Reiko Waki, a young student taking time off from her factory work in Oita City, remembers watching one of these battles. “One day I saw an aerial fight between a Grumman and a Zero above Mt. Kangoe in Hiji. It was like I was watching a movie. Later the body of the Grumman pilot was found at the shoreline of Toyooka. He was buried in a field nearby with respect by Hiji city leaders.”

The war grew closer as the specter of death surrounded Oita. Families throughout the prefecture now regularly mourned the loss of their sons, brothers, and husbands as the brutality of the fighting intensified around the Pacific. The local newspaper did not flinch from reporting the high rate of mortality among the local soldiers, and highlighted some of these deaths with photos and brief biographies of the men in a regular special section. The March 18, 1945, edition of Oita Godo Press is but one example. Under the headline, “Profiles of Three Soldiers,” readers found the following:

Yashio Jinno, 1st Class Fireman,
Born in Ongubaru, Ohno-gun,
Killed in battle, winter last year
Katsusaburou (59) father, Ima (57) mother, Haruo (38) eldest brother,
Ukie (34) wife with five children, Yoshio’s younger brother Yuichi (20) is an active volunteer in the army in Manchuria.

7 Akinori Endo, ed., Memories of Youth during the War, Association of Reminiscences: Record of Student Mobilization by Secondary School Students in Oita Prefecture, Oita City, Oita Prefecture, 2005, pp. 69–70.
Tameyoshi Fujiwara, 1st Class Fireman  
Born in Kohazama, Ouchi, Kitsuki-machi,  
Killed in battle in Manchuria last summer  
Yoshi (65) mother and three brothers, Terunaga, Hajime, and Hitoshi are engaged in farming at home.

Teiichi Okubo, 1st Class Sergeant  
Born in Nishishonai-mura, Resided in Kaneike, Oita City  
Killed in battle in the South Pacific in winter the year before last  
Hanayo (29) wife, Kasunobu (11) and two other children are left at home.

By the time the American forces landed on Okinawa on April 1, people in Oita were already feeling the effects of this massive battle through the growing number of attacks all around them. They understood that the Americans were attacking the air bases throughout the prefecture in order to keep Japanese planes away from Okinawa, and that they sought to improve their odds by destroying planes on the ground. The Americans' fear of kamikaze attacks, many departing out of Oita City, Usa, and other nearby bases in Kyushu, was central to this concern. The bombing was merciless.

On the island of Okinawa itself, American and Japanese ground forces engaged in one of the most brutal fights in the history of warfare, one that could decide the future of the war. As American bombs fell around Oita and other parts of Japan, American sailors nervously watched the skies for kamikaze.

E.B. Sledge and Don “Slim” Carlton were two young Marines preparing to invade Okinawa. Sledge recalls:

After maneuvers were completed, our convoy sailed from the Russell Islands on 15 March 1945. We were bound for Ulithi Atoll where the convoy would join the gathering invasion fleet. We anchored off Ulithi on 21 March and remained there until 27 March.... At Ulithi we received briefings on the coming battle for Okinawa. This time there was no promise of a short operation. “This is expected to be the costliest amphibious campaign of the war,” a lieutenant said. “We will be hitting an island about 350 miles from the Japs’ home islands, so you can expect them to fight with more determination than ever. We can expect 80 to 85 percent casualties on the beach.” A buddy next to me leaned over and whispered, “How’s that for boosting the troops’ morale?” … “Be on the alert for a Jap paratrooper attack in our rear, particularly at night. It’s pretty certain the Nips will pull off a massive counterattack, probably supported by
tanks, sometime during the first night ashore or just before dawn. They’ll ‘banzai’ and try to push us off the beachhead.”  

On 27 March the loudspeaker came on with, “Now hear this, now hear this. Special sea detail stand by.” Sailors assigned to the detail moved to their stations where they weighed anchor. 

Tension mounted on the eve of D day. We received final orders to move in off the beach as fast as possible. We were also reminded that although we were in regimental reserve, we would probably “get the hell kicked out of us” coming on the beach. We were advised to hit the sack early; we would need all the rest we could get. 

A predawn reveille ushered in Easter Sunday – April Fool’s Day – 1945. The ship seethed with activity. We had chow of steak and eggs, the usual feast before the slaughter. I returned to our troop compartment and squared away my ammunition, combat pack, and mortar ammunition bag. The ship's crew manned battle stations and stood by to repel kamikaze attacks. Dawn was breaking, and the preassault bombardment of the beaches had begun. Above it I could hear the drone of enemy aircraft inbound to the attack.8 

Carlton, in another ship of the same convoy, writes: 

We finally assembled as ordered.... The officer began, “We are ... heading for the invasion of Okinawa.” “Where the hell is that?” A man behind me muttered. “Never heard of it,” his buddy answered. The officer enlightened us.... Unfortunately, the island contained many civilians who were not to be trusted. “What about the civilians?” a man asked. “Do we kill them or let them go?” “You’ll have to play it by ear,” was the answer. Hopefully they’ll get out of our way, do not trust them.” 

“How about prisoners?” “Due to logistic difficulties, you will take no prisoners for the first three days. Is that clear?” 

The last day of March arrived. Tomorrow would be April Fool’s Day and Easter Sunday. Chaplains conducted services. Catholics received Absolution and Communion. A “special” dinner was served, but I cannot recall the menu. I looked at the men around me. Fear was evident on many faces; mine was one of them. How would the landing be? Would the enemy rip us to shreds before we reached the beach? Would we get pinned down and decimated on the beach before we could move inland? All these, and other thoughts, filled my mind.9 

Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, chief military strategist for the Japanese troops on Okinawa, recalls the importance of air power to the success in winning the battle. Writing in his memoirs after the war, he recalls the optimism of Japan’s air superiority in the early days of the battle:

In early April 1945, seemingly authoritative information came from one of the secret special service organization units in Harbin saying that if our air attacks on the U.S. Navy could continue for another ten days, the enemy would be forced to break off operations on Okinawa. This lifted our spirits and led us to believe that we might again succeed in regaining enemy occupied territory.10

On April 6, aboard the American minesweeper USS Defense, all eyes were on the skies, watching for approaching kamikaze. One young sailor on this ship, Carroll Williams, from a small town in Ohio, fashioned a rough poem after that week to hand down to his children. His reflections show why in early April the Japanese command had hopes for these special attack missions and why the American bombing of air strips and aircraft repair factories was so relentless.

5 Minutes of Hell
April the sixth, a day on my mind.
A day to remember, the rest of my time.
The Japs came down, about 4 o’clock,
Dropping from clouds like showers of rocks.
Off went the alarm, our guns we did mount.
Planes coming in, we began to count.
One on the port, coming in low.
A suicide dive to wipe out his foe.
The plane is just about to hit.
The Jap, he must have lost his grip.
The plane shot up into the air.
The twenties marked him for their fare.
Our faces looked just like a bell,
We had knocked that Jap to hell.
Rejoicing was not yet to come,
Other planes were making runs.
Our guns we did then mount again,

10 Yahara, p. 45.
_waited for the planes coming in.
A twenty then did open up,
Shot at a plane coming at us.
The plane was hit; it swerved around,
The pilot knew we were out of bounds.
He headed down, a long, low glide,
And hit a destroyer on the side.
We looked around, two more were to come.
We waited for them with ready guns.
The planes came flying out of the sun,
One on the stern, one on the bow;
Everyone thinking, I hope God’s my pal.
A hell of a thing, those planes coming in,
Living death flying on those wings.
The nerves of our stomachs were knotted and tight.
Every man’s face was filled with fright.
One on the bow was now coming in,
Swooping low like a flying fiend.
We poured everything at his flying plane.
He did not stop, for on he came
We shot him down, just below the bow.
The sound of his crashing was mighty loud,
A terrific explosion, it shook the clouds.
A crash of lightening, the thunder roared,
Like flashing the hammer of the mighty Thor.
Some were wounded in the crash of the plane.
Their minds will never be the same.11

April 21, 1945

While Americans and Japanese killed each other without mercy on Okinawa, the citizens of Oita City, Usa, and Saiki dreaded attacks daily. Air strikes came primarily from two sources. First, bombing and strafing from the Grumman Hellcat, known throughout Japan simply as “Grumman,”

brought the close-range attacks. Use of the Grumman continued throughout the war for low-altitude attacks and reconnaissance. The second, and most frightening, were the fire and delayed action bombs from General LeMay’s B-29s.

It was the attack on April 21, 1945, that stands out as one of the most memorable and tragic days of the war for the young students working in the military factories around Oita City. That morning, the sirens went off at 6:18, followed by an unfamiliar thunderous rolling sound. As people looked to the sky, they saw the outlines of B-29s flying high overhead. They had seen these planes before, but in those cases they had bypassed Oita for larger targets to the north of the prefecture. Then at 6:50 a.m. bombs began to rain all around them. Parts of the city were ablaze. The areas around Oita station were destroyed and trains rendered useless. Many houses burned and scores of people died. Two hundred bombs later the planes left and the sirens went silent.

The military factories kept working, as they had escaped bombing. However, just when everyone thought the worst was over, one single B-29 bomber flew over Oita. The target was the 12th Naval Air Factory’s third plant.

The searing memories of this day never left those who witnessed and survived that day. Ichiro Hashimoto remembers:

It was fourteen minutes past noon when a bomb landed on our factory. Nineteen of my friends, all student workers, were killed instantly. There had been no evacuation alarm. A total of 70 people died from this one bomb. Had I been at my work station I would have been killed along with them. By a stroke of luck, I was away on an errand at that time. I remember clearly people screaming and one girl crying out, “It hurts! Help! Please!” In the aftermath, when we cleaned up the scene, blood and bodies were everywhere. The machines fell on people; the second floor collapsed and crushed the skulls of people; and brain matter spattered all over the place. I still remember every detail.

The students that died were all close friends of mine. When we had first reported for work at the factories, my teacher divided us up according to where we lived. The boys who had sat all around me, in front and in back, to my left and to my right all died that day. So many people died in the factory that day we held a mass cremation by the river. There was no special ceremony for the dead students; there wasn’t anything we could do for them during the war. The factory as an organization did nothing. But individually, some of us went to the homes of our dead friends and prayed with their families. After the war, the sister of one of
the boys erected a memorial statue at Uenogaoka High School [called Oita High School during the war] where most of the dead boys had studied. The statue shows a teenage boy in military uniform, down to the army leggings we all wore. Now, every year on April 21 we still go to Uenogaoka High School to remember those perished on that day. The bombing on April 21, 1945, is something I can never forget.

Twelve-year-old Yoshio Ninomiya was walking by the river in Oita after the bombing, and he watched from a distance as people disposed of the bodies. “The people who died in the bombing of the factory were still in their work uniforms when they were taken to the river. I happened to be there and I watched from some distance. I saw about 30 to 40 bodies lying by the river as the burial workers poured gasoline over them and set them afire.”

While word spread quickly around Oita City that something terrible had happened, the local newspaper covered neither the extent of the bombing nor the deaths of the students, so the details of the deaths and cremations were kept quiet and known only to those directly affected. In the April 22 Oita Godo Press, a sanitized and brief mention of the bombing appeared on page 2.

B-29s recently reconnoitered over Oita repeatedly, aiming at two important facilities on the 21st. Air raid alarms were sounded at 6:25. Three formations of B-29s, two of nine, another of ten planes, intruded into Oita City from the southeastern sea at 8:10. About 30 B-29s came over the Bungo channel to drop a series of bombs. They dropped some medium-sized bombs and combinations of time bombs with incendiary bombs. Damage was minimal. The air raid alarm sounded an all-clear at 9:23. Later, however, two more attacks were made by one, maybe two, B-29s at 12:21 and 1:25. No damage was reported by these attacks. Although all Oita citizens fought for air defense courageously, we still have concerns with these attacks. At no time should we relax our defensive vigilance.12

On the same day that Oita City endured this bombing, Usa’s naval air base also felt the force of an American attack. According to official U.S. military reports, the 21st Bomb Squadron of the 20th Naval Air Fleet sent 29 planes to drop 545 bombs on Usa. The official U.S. report on this attack was titled, “Assist War Efforts in Okinawa by Destroying Japanese Air-Naval Base.” Half of the bombs were standard 225 kg bombs and the other half were
time bombs set to explode between 1 and 36 hours after impact. The planes departed from the Marianas for this mission. By official American count, nine Japanese planes were immobilized on the ground, while eighteen turret guns, three barracks, two plane shelters, and an electric power plant were put out of action. Two air strips also suffered damage. No American plane was downed or damaged, as there was no meaningful resistance from Japanese forces due both to attrition and to concentration of air attacks on American ships in and around Okinawa.

The bombings of Oita City and Usa on April 21 were considered “highly successful” by General LeMay and his air commanders. Photos taken from the American planes showed an “excellent bomb path with many hits on hangers and administrative buildings and several planes visible on the ground were destroyed. No flak was encountered over this airfield.” Multiple types of bombs were dropped over Oita City from seventeen B-29 bombers. These included 170 time bombs, so feared by the populace, who had no idea when they would explode after hitting the ground. These AN-M64 bombs were programmed with different delay mechanisms in order to “extend the effectiveness of the bombs.” This strategy was aimed to prevent quick repair of runways, roads, and airplanes, as the bombs could go off at any time. At the same time, this intimidated and demoralized the citizens living in these areas. The numbers of time-delay bombs dropped over Oita City that day included the following:

- 9 one-hour delay
- 9 two-hour delay
- 50 six-hour delay
- 51 twelve-hour delay
- 34 twenty-four-hour delay
- 17 thirty-six-hour delay

The attack on Usa saw 29 planes dropping 136 tons of explosives with a similar ratio of time-delay bombs. Other attacks would soon follow, making any meaningful recovery impossible. Yet the government of Japan would not acknowledge the obvious, thus ensuring that many thousands more would continue to die needlessly. While these bombs were falling throughout Oita, the battle for Okinawa intensified. Don “Slim” Carlton recalls:

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We advanced unopposed for a couple of days. At last we moved into a road cut and were told to dig in.... Toward the enemy was Hill 178. To take it from the enemy would become a bitter battle.... A short time after Tony, my new assistant gunner, and I finished digging the foxhole behind the gun; a small patrol came up behind us. “Looks like they’re going to test the area in front of us,” Tony observed. The patrol consisted of four riflemen and a guy toting a flamethrower. “Good luck, guys,” I said as they passed.... They had only advanced twenty yards when mortar shells rained down on them.... The men started to crawl back. The man dragging the flamethrower was not lucky. A mortar round landed close to him, throwing him in the air. When he landed, we could see both legs had been blown off at mid-thigh.

Then a strange thing happened. A Jap soldier less than ten feet in front of me stood up. He did not turn and run, but stood motionless staring directly at me. His arms were motionless at his sides. Was he surrendering? Too bad. This was one of the bastards who were killing our men yesterday. I pulled the trigger several times. A look of surprise appeared on his face. Dirt flew from his shirtfront. He tumbled backwards.14

No Place to Hide

By late April hardly a day passed without the sound of air raid sirens. As the eerie sound of the B-29s approached, the people wondered if this would be the day they would die. Ichiro Hashimoto recalls:

During the B-29s bombing campaign, whenever the sirens went off, especially if we were walking to work in our assigned factories, we’d run back home. At one point, no buildings were left standing anywhere in sight. The incendiary devices burned almost everything. Miraculously, my house and the house right next door to ours survived the bombing, while all other buildings along the way were burned to the ground. Later we recovered bomb shell casings in my neighborhood and donated them to the metal factory.

Trying to maintain a sense of normalcy while waiting for the next attack, the younger children were sent off to school, and women carried on their morning shopping and housework. But nothing was normal, and routine lives proved impossible to maintain for long. People recalled later the

14 Carlton, pp. 24-32.
deafening thunder that shook the air as the American pilots increased their attacks. Residents dashed to their shelters when the bombs started to fall; they felt the ground shake violently; they heard their homes, shops, and streets being ripped apart; and they held hands in their dark shelters, praying for the bombing to stop.

When the bombers left, people came out of their shelters and gathered together to see how their neighbors fared. In one neighborhood, a bomb fell directly on top of one house, killing a family of four. Panic set in, and speculation spread that an American aircraft carrier had entered Beppu Bay. People feared that the American planes were bound to come back again and they realized they were not prepared to withstand these attacks, as their air raid shelters were practically worthless. Why, many asked, had neither the government nor the military instructed them how to construct proper shelters? They were left to their own devices. Some dug tunnels in the soft limestone of the surrounding hillsides, but they could not always get that far away on short notice. Others just dug shallow holes and tried to cover them with whatever they could find.

Ichiro Hashimoto recalls, “I lived just behind Oita station in the middle of the city. After the bombing started, my family ran outside the city to a shelter we had constructed. But looking back now, the shelter wouldn’t have done any good. We just dug a hole in the ground and covered it with wood. Not that we had any choice to do otherwise.” Masaaki Yano’s family in Kitsuki dug an air raid shelter in the garden just outside the front entrance of the house. “Each house had their own shelter, but I don’t think such shelters were effective. Nevertheless, it was the only place for my family to escape into to try and save our lives.”

People in the center of Oita City realized a normal life was not possible, and they began sending their children to the countryside to keep them out of harm’s way. Before long, entire families followed. Misayo Hamasaki recalled:

People were confronted by other challenges, even in the simple matter of clothing and diet. Traditional kimonos for everyday wear were replaced by more practical trousers, which allowed women to run away from bombs, as well work more effectively in the fields and factories. Young men wore military uniforms even while doing civilian work and in school, so that when they were conscripted, they’d already have their uniforms. By the end of the war, no clothes were available in stores; all were made at home and altered when necessary. Food became so scarce, that ration coupons were used for salt, sugar, and other staples. Eventually, even the
coupons were not always accepted, and a lottery was set up to decide whose coupons would be honored.

On April 26, the B-29s returned to Usa. Machiko Mamasaki recalls the bombing and the chaos of the following days in lively detail. Her father and brother were away fighting, and she lived alone with her mother.

It was an unforgettable morning. The B-29 air raid sirens wouldn’t stop going off, as the bombs fell. From the eastern skies, 27 fighter planes and two B-29s flew in a westerly direction. My mother called to me, “Machiko, go to the shelter quickly!” We ran quickly into the shelter. Our air raid shelter was only a few meters away from our house along the Choshu Road toward Usa-Miyagu, under the fields, diagonally into the ground. It could hold about 20 people and was easily accessible. It was dark inside, and I’d hold myself tight as the earth trembled with the thunders of the bomb explosions. We could figure out that the sounds came from the Yanagaura direction. Eventually the deafening sounds faded into the distance.

It was my first bombing experience, with the ground shaking so eerily. The grown-ups speculated that the Usa Air Base, which was only a couple hundred meters away from our shelter, must have been the target. Emerging from the shelter, we saw thick black smoke coming from the Yanagaura direction. Someone came running toward us yelling, “All of Usa has been attacked.” At that moment the B-29s had turned around, flying even lower. “They’re coming back” everyone screamed as we sprinted back into the shelter we had just come out of. Within five seconds of getting back into the shelter, we heard the bombs whistling above our heads, followed immediately by repeated explosions. It wasn’t just one or two. The ground shook and the shelter came crushing down, dirt falling all over us. We couldn’t move. “Machiko, be brave,” my mother said repeatedly in a faint voice. What was going on? What were we supposed to do? We gathered together in the middle of the shelter and held on to each other tightly.

The sound of the bombs grew faint; the sound of destruction grew faint. We were all safe but no one could speak all still shaking with fear. Finally, we got out of the shelter, shaking the dirt off our clothes. Scared and shaky, we headed toward the road once again. It was a surreal sight. Half of Nansho-san’s mansion, which stood out so prominently just before the bombing, disappeared. His spare house was nowhere to be found. Power lines along the road were down, and the poles split in half. Roofs,
doors, and walls of houses in the area were gone. The roof of my house was blown off, and the house leaned to one side. A hole big enough for two adults to walk through opened in our kitchen wall. Everyone was puzzled about the hole. We looked into the hole, but it was too dark for us to assess the extent of the damage. We soon found out Nansho-san and one of his workers died in the bombing. I was terribly upset that my house had been hit, but the feeling of my neighbors’ death was even more overwhelming. All of a sudden, I started running toward the road. I wanted to escape from the horror in front of me.

Apparently, the worker had run into Nansho-san’s house thinking he’d be safe. However, the bomb hit squarely on the house and he had no chance. Nansho-san’s wife had attempted to run to the shelter, but when she realized that she was too slow to reach the shelter in time, she wisely jumped in the river instead, which actually saved her. When we got to what remained of her house, she was crying as she picked up body parts of her husband off the ground. If this wasn’t hell, I didn’t know what was. We helped her pick up pieces of the worker and Nansho-san with chopsticks and put them in boxes.

As Nansho-san’s wife thanked us for helping her, a neighbor came running. He was out of breath and muttered that Iseban-san was dead. Iseban-san was a Korean man who lived by himself by the lake. He tended fields and collected garbage from people. Many of us went to help. He’d been killed by the shock of the bomb blasts. He looked like he was sleeping. We had a funeral for him by the lake.

It was evening by the time my mother and I could return to our own home. Mother and child, we had no idea where to start cleaning up. We began by taking all of the broken furniture outside. As we were working, people from all over the village came to help us. Then the police came and informed us that the big hole on our kitchen wall came from a time bomb, and it could go off any time. They ordered everyone to evacuate immediately. Scared, we went to stay at a friend’s home about 300 meters away. We spent a sleepless night. Early the next morning, a young man and five of his friends came. He said to my mother, “I know it’s difficult because the time bomb had not gone off yet, but is there anything you absolutely need from the house?” My mother replied, “The road up to our house has been roped off and no one can get in. We don’t know when the time bomb may go off. I appreciate your kindness but I beg you not to go there.” The young man replied, “We’ve already been drafted and we are leaving for the front soon. It doesn’t really make a difference where we die. So please let us help you.”
Mother thought for a minute and said, “If this is true then I do ask that you take out our shrine. It was furthest away from the kitchen and wasn't damaged. If you can carry it, please get it for us.”

“Yes ma'am.” The young men took off running toward our house. They brought us the shrine and three bags of rice from the house. I still pray to that shrine today.

The second night came, and I was still shaken and couldn't sleep. On the third day, at five in the early morning, we heard a large boom. The windows shook. “What was that?” We went outside to take a look and found dark smoke coming from where my house once stood. There was nothing left. My mother fell to the ground in tears. I cried, too. The man at whose house we were staying said, “Your house may be gone. Everything may be gone. But we will go on. Think about it, had you not left the house, you and everyone else helping you would have been dead. Be happy that you lived. As long as you're alive, you can go on.” I agreed, but couldn't stop crying.

The area around our home would get attacked repeatedly by the Grumman with their rockets and bullets, but there was not another incident so destructive as that one. Three houses were totally destroyed, and 25 others were either burned or severely damaged. There were eight deep holes in the ground that filled with water on the lot where our home used to stand. But we rebuilt a house and we put the shrine back in its place.\(^\text{15}\)

Seiji Oki recalled a similar encounter in July 1945 near Usa:

One morning at 8:30 after an attack, we came out of the shelter to find a priest from the local shrine all shaken up. He'd already gone around town checking on people and said, “There's a bomb hole at Norio's house. We went with him to Norio's house and found a number of people there already. Right in the middle of Norio's yard was a hole about three meters in diameter. No one really understood why there was a hole there. It was like nothing we had seen before. After suggesting that maybe everyone should evacuate the area, the priest went to inform the police. The police and the fire department came, as did officials from City Hall, but no one knew what to do. So the policemen went back to the Police Department to receive instructions. In the meantime, people peered into the hole with trembling hearts. I was so scared that I went straight home and hid in the shelter. As it turned out, the hole was made by a

\(^\text{15}\) Matsuki, pp. 122-124.
big time bomb. A police officer went around the neighborhood on his bicycle shouting “Evacuate!! Evacuate! Evacuate the area now!!” The police, firemen, and city employees were exhausted from riding around on their bicycles to help people stay safe.

About twelve hours later, as my family’s farm helper was getting ready to feed the cows, the ground shook like a huge earthquake. It rocked so hard that our shelter started to cave in. Not knowing what was going on, our entire family held each other tightly. Then, we heard someone shouting “It went up!! It went up!!” We came out of the shelter but nothing looked out of the ordinary. The helper said, “The bomb went off at Norio’s house!” We went to look at Norio’s house. The house had shattered to pieces as if it was dropped from high up. Apparently, the house had gone straight up and come straight down with pieces landing 30 meters away. Because everyone had evacuated, there was no one injured that day. But that was when I learned how horrible time bombs really were.16

Filling the Craters and Building the Shelters

Following the attacks on Usa, a group of students from a nearby town were sent to help rebuild the air base. They stayed there for two months, dodging periodic American attacks and learning what it meant to sacrifice for the Japanese war effort.

I entered Nakatsu Middle School in early April, 1945, just as Japan came under heavy attack. That was the end of my schooling for the time being. The students in higher grades had become student laborers already, working in factories all over Japan. Now, we first-year students received our orders. We were sent to Usa Air Base and had no clue what kind of work awaited us. Though with some trepidation, I looked forward to it. In the beginning of April, nervous yet excited, my friends and I gathered at Nakatsu station. Two hundred bright, young faces scattered around the area. The 7:30 train started moving. As we got closer to the Yanagaura station we were told to close our curtains as spies could be watching. But we stole looks out the windows anyway, hoping to catch a glimpse of something new or unexpected.

When we arrived at Yanagaura station, training officers in uniforms met us. They looked smart as they bowed to our teacher. After exchanging a few words, they split us up into five groups. Off we went, following the officers. We headed down a dusty road to the air base. I had expected to see planes lining the air strip with properly uniformed pilots coming to greet us. But once there, we were shocked to see a lone plane sitting on the runway. It had been destroyed by the Grummans in March. My expectations were but a dream. A bomb had left a small crater, 20 meters in diameter, next to the destroyed plane. Reddish muddy water filled the hole. “Your job is to fill this hole!” shouted the officer. We had all fantasized about being a part of more meaningful work and started whining about it. Our school teacher turned around and scolded us.

We then climbed into trucks and headed away from the base. Along the roadside stood planes camouflaged by bamboo and dirt. They must have been sprayed by Grumman bullets, because they were all covered with bullet holes. There wasn't a single plane that was left fully intact. Could we really win the war like this, I wondered?

Eventually the truck stopped at the bank of the Ekkan River. There, five soldiers were waiting for us. They paired us up, giving each two-person team a pail and a thick wooden shoulder pole to carry the pail. We put the bigger, flat rocks at the bottom of the pail and then filled the sides with smaller rocks. Because it was our first time, we didn't know how to do this efficiently. Until we learned to breathe and move in synch, we'd spilled the rocks along the way. We filled the trucks with rocks. Once the trucks were full, we would ride on the truck back to the air strip. Riding the truck felt good with the cool breeze against us.

Once we got to the air strip, hell awaited us. We stuffed the pails with rocks once again and unloaded them into the bombed-out hole. Because the hole was so big, it took 40 of us about two weeks to fill it.

After we finished filling this hole, there were other air raids, which created fresh new holes in the ground. While we were working, the air raid sirens would go off. When that happened, we stopped working and ran to the shelter on the east bank of the Ekkan River. It was like having a break. Eventually the sounds of the sirens would change to the sounds of explosions and we would get quiet in the shelter, holding our breath until the B-29s passed by.

The warning sirens would typically let us know about 30 minutes before danger approached, but there were times when we had no warning, and the Grummans would shoot at the trucks racing toward the shelter. We were just thankful it wasn’t us in the trucks that got hit.
Our days weren’t without fun. At lunchtime, the students spread out along the river, dipping our feet in the cool water as we ate. Because of food rations, our rice balls were made with other grains and came only with salted seaweed or pickled plums. Eventually, we took this time to get to know and enjoy the company of the 20-year-old officers.

After lunch, we would sometimes jump in the river and try to catch fish. Four or five of us would chase the fish into a corner and grab them with our hands. We got a full hour for lunch so we got pretty good at catching fish. At the end of lunch, we would split the fish evenly and hide them from each other, making sure to take them home in the evening.

When we got done with work for the day, we’d receive a cup of rice to take home. We were treated as hard laborers, and we were always hungry. It was impossible to fill the holes under such physical conditions, so they finally decided to ration us an extra cup of rice each day. But we each had to bring our own bag to carry it. If we forgot our bag, we got no rice. So every morning when we left home, we double checked that we had our lunch and the bag for rice.

Around four in the afternoon, work was done and we’d lined up for rice. Two soldiers rationed out the rice. We always asked them to fill the cup of rice to the brim. The soldier that was generous always had a longer line, even though that meant we had to wait longer. “Hey! The rest of you get in the next line!” they’d yell at us. We couldn’t argue so we grudgingly got in the line of the guy who wasn’t as generous, thinking that the day had been a waste. Lack of food does terrible things to people.

For about two months, we continued to fill the holes; it was not until rainy season came in June that our work was done.17

Seiji Oki was a junior high school student in 1945. In accordance with a new governmental command to students working in the war effort, he and others repaired and camouflaged airplane shelters at Usa Air Base.

From May to June, twice a week students from different schools and districts gathered at a meeting place. We’d find out our job assignment for that day and receive the tools we were to use. A commander would give us a quick instruction and conclude it with a yell “Get to it!”

We carried our tools and headed to the Usa Air Base where some airplane shelters stood in plain sight. These were 7- to 8-meter-tall concrete buildings, about 300 meters apart from each other. Our job was to cover the

17 Ibid., pp. 125-126.
structures with dirt and grass to hide them from American planes flying overhead. We found out later, in fact, no matter how well we camouflaged the shelters, the enemy planes spotted them easily. Nonetheless, we followed orders and did our job.

About fifteen or sixteen students and adults worked on each shelter, piling the dirt on the roof of the shelter from both sides. The objective was to cover the structures with at least three centimeters of dirt. This was a task that the kids couldn’t stay focused on for long. The commander was nice enough to not shout at us when we were tired or weary. He would encourage us by saying “Keep up the good work! Don’t slack off or the enemies are going to get us!” I think he knew that this was a physical job more intense than what middle school kids could handle. Slowly the visible concrete became less and less, and we saw that we were making some progress. Day by day the scenery changed.

From June through July we planted seeds in the dirt. The work was less physical, so it became more fun than going to school. For lunch, we were given rice balls with a nice, big chestnut in the middle and some pickled radishes. I had never eaten this at home but because we were so hungry it tasted really good. Occasionally the commander would bring us extra rice balls if he could get his hands on it. That would make us so happy and he almost felt like a father to us.

Then one day at around 10:00 in the morning the raid sirens went off. Most of the people ran into shrines, temples, or the nearby woods. Following the navy lieutenant’s orders, the students evacuated toward one of the military base shelters. There were about 50 to 60 kids from the different schools there. I was surprised at what I saw inside the shelter. There was a 4-meter-wide and 2-meter-tall tunnel carved out that must have been about 50 meters deep. According to the lieutenant, the weapons standing against the wall were the newest 99 rifles. We then entered another side tunnel and as I got closer I was surprised to see even more weapons and tools everywhere. I was at a loss for words and the lieutenant just said “Tour’s over.”

We settled down and ate our rice balls. Still restless, we went to the entrance of the shelter, looking out for signs of enemy planes, when behind us we heard someone getting slapped and a voice said “I’m so sorry. It will never happen again.” I turned around and saw a 50-year-old man, who had come from Shikoku for work, beaten by a 20-year-old soldier simply because he “doesn’t salute properly.” I wondered if beating someone while we were in the midst of a war was such a good idea.

One day, when the shelters were almost completely covered, we had just finished eating our rice balls when the sirens went off again. Normally,
each time the sirens went off, an adult was to direct the students where to go. But this time, no one came. We stood there asking each other "so ... what do we do now?" All of a sudden we heard guns going off in the sky above us. Someone called out “It's the enemy! Run!!" We scattered instantly like bees out of a nest. Without thinking, I started running west toward my home. I ran through the forest and hid in the train station. Two students had darted into a barn on the west side of the station. It seems the Grumman had seen them because the pilot started shooting at the barn. Peering out of the station I thought my heart was about to stop. Pretty soon, the barn went up in flames and eventually burned to the ground. I found out later that the two kids had slipped out of the barn as the fire started, using the smoke as cover.18

In Oita City even younger children were assigned clean up and repair duties. Yoshio Ninomiya was an upper elementary school student in early 1945.

During the last year of the war there was no school, and we all had to work. My classmates and I went to the river bank to collect gravel. We loaded it into trucks, which transported them to Oita Air Base, where bombs had created holes all over the landing strips. We filled those holes with gravel every day from 9:00 in the morning till 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon. We did this until the last day of the war. I was twelve years old at that time, and the eleven-year-olds were doing the same.

Other children were assigned to dig air raid shelters to protect military equipment. One was twelve-year-old Toyoki Goto.

We went 8 kilometers outside Oita City where we helped dig a cave in the mountain side. When the military factories were bombed, they moved the repair work to the caves we built. Sometimes we’d be under attack by the American planes while we were digging into the mountain. Once, while we were working, several Grummans came and started shooting at us with machine guns. They flew so close that we could see the pilots clearly. We ran as fast as we could to the shelter. I didn't really feel fear or death, since we’d all been taught that we were going to die soon for our country anyway. If anything, being killed by Grummans would be an honorable way to die for my country. Mostly we were just pissed off

18 Fujisawa, pp. 45-48.
at them for ruining our work! There were over 20 students working at the construction site, and we were lucky because none of us were killed. I was also happy that, when we went back to work, we found that it was not entirely destroyed. I remember my first thought upon seeing that, “Hey, where's my lunch?”

Some of the younger schoolchildren, like Yasuo Tanaka, were more fortunate in their assignments.

My classmates and I were sent to surrounding villages during planting and harvest seasons. This was because the men were away fighting, leaving only women and old people to work the farm. The students were divided into groups and lived with different families. Our teachers went with us, but they just watched as we worked cutting weeds, planting crops, and gathering vegetables. The farmers were glad to have our assistance, since all the work was done by hand back then, and it was a backbreaking job. For us, though, it was an ideal assignment because in the city we didn't have enough food, while here we worked for farming families who had enough rice to eat.

The role of school girls working in military installations in the final year of the war was fraught with as much danger as that of the boys. In some cases they remind us of the chaos of war, not all of which is associated with bombing attacks. Reiko Waki recalls:

In 1945 I was already fifteen years old. My regular job at the air base entailed handling confidential documents. I assisted an officer who worked on Zero airplanes, some of which were used by kamikaze pilots, including their machine guns, gun sights, and wireless applications. I worked with him on each plane, and I was popular with all the soldiers in that department.

Then, on March 23, 1945, and after the usual lining up and roll call at the air base, some of us played rock-paper-scissors, to see who would go by truck to deliver supplies to factory workers around the base. The winners, one boy and four girls, and I happily climbed up on the back of a truck, waiting to leave. We all enjoyed going out in the truck, as it was refreshing to be outside and everybody enjoyed the truck ride. However, at the last minute, I was ordered to stay behind to work in the office that day. Naturally, I was quite disappointed. My friends comforted me and said I could probably go with them the next day. But, that afternoon, we
heard the terrible news that there had been an accident and the truck had fallen into a drainage ditch. We heard that all five of my friends had been crushed under the cargo. After work, some of us rushed to the hospital to see them, but they had already died. Light makeup had been put on the faces of the four girls in preparation for their funerals.\footnote{Endo, pp. 69-70.}

The sacrifices the girls made to support the military extended from dangerous work to the lack of daily comforts to the scarcity of medical services. Reiko continues:

We lived in a dorm close to the air base. The food was intolerable. Occasionally, the families of the girls from farms would bring them sweet potatoes, rice, and soy sauce, and they’d share with the rest of us. Also, even though the bath in the dormitory was big enough to hold 30 to 50 people, we had to wait our turn. Soldiers went first, next factory workers, and the students last. By then the hot water was mostly gone, and the pool was dirty. But no one complained. Our slogan was “We never fall down until we obtain victory,” which we repeated all the time. Just be patient, we told ourselves, just be patient.\footnote{Ibid.}

Patience was indeed needed in huge quantities, and tested to the limit when the young girls found themselves unworthy of limited medical attention.

One day while walking in the air base, a needle penetrated my shoe. The sole of my right foot became infected and began to swell. Soon I couldn’t walk. I was hospitalized in Nakamura Hospital where my arms and legs were tied to each corner of the bed, and a towel put in my mouth. The doctor cut my foot and cleaned out the infection without using any anesthesia. Anesthesia was reserved only for soldiers. Masako Sano, a friend and classmate from Mori High School, had an even worse ordeal. One day when an air raid siren sounded, she and other students were ordered to push an airplane to a hiding place by a mountain slope. In the chaos, someone stepped on her sandal, and she fell under the wheel of the airplane. The factory workers at the scene yelled, “Stretcher, bring a stretcher!” She was rushed to the doctor’s office at the factory; however, because the air raid siren was still on, she was put in a shelter without any treatment. I ran to find our teacher, who was
with us at the factory every day, but nobody was in the teachers' room. The aerial attack started, my friend was in danger, and my teacher was not there. I almost cried. But I decided that I must find my teacher. As I was running about the base looking for her, the guards screamed at me, “Hurry up! Evacuate to safety right now!” But I kept running despite the tense and extraordinary atmosphere, listening to the siren and calling for my teacher. Finally I found her at a small shelter in the middle of a peach orchard. She immediately got on her bike, and I ran after her to the shelter where Masako was. Her right femur was broken. My teacher put Masako’s head on her knee, stroking her hair softly, encouraging her to “Stay strong, stay strong.” Finally the attack ended; Masako was brought back to the doctor’s office. The skin on her foot was twisted around the femur and was terribly swollen. The doctor told us to pull up on Masako’s upper body, and he pulled down on her bent leg. Nothing changed. Her leg was too badly mutilated, and too much time had passed. She screamed in pain, and the doctor yelled at her, “Don’t cry! Clinch your teeth! This is nothing. If you cry, again, I will hit you.” Masako didn’t say anything, but the pain was so awful she pulled at our clothes so hard our clothes were torn. She was carried to the naval hospital to recover. She never returned to work. She came back to see us only once, using a crutch. And that was the last time we saw her. She passed away not long after that. A fifteen-year-old girl left this world without knowing the joys of life. She was but one of the war victims.21