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Beyond the Bluish Smoke
by Mokuo Nagayama

(1)

Out of the mud-walled sheds standing among the terraced fields came faint columns of smoke. Grandfather (Mother's father) explained: "Mokuo, you see, they are drying tobacco leaves."

This mountain village was highly cultivated. The villagers grew fruit and tobacco, not to mention rice. Grandfather's home stood on the highest hill of the village commanding a fine view of the Seto Inland Sea and Shikoku in the far distance.

He was then the village headman. Like the Emperor Nintoku



who was delighted to see kitchen smoke rising here and there, he was happy to see the smoke ascending from tobacco drying sheds, suggestive of the vigor and liveliness of the village people.

On the other hand, my father was a heavy smoker with a nasty smell. Choked with his cigarette smoke, I wondered how he could

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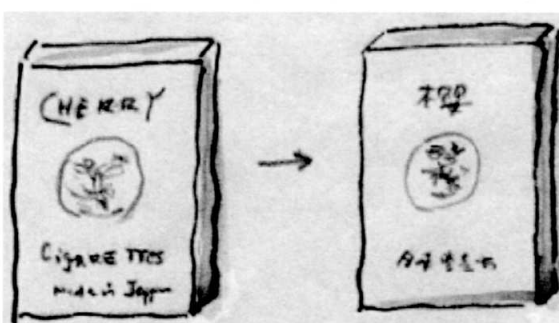
enjoy it.

When I was in the third grade of primary school, I attended a calligraphy class on Sundays. One afternoon I found the teacher's son sitting on the tatami before the family Buddhist altar. He was a student of Kurashiki Commercial School and was confined to his house because he had been caught smoking. He had to apologize to his ancestors as well as to his parents. It was the first time for me to learn the term "Kinshin" (disciplinary confinement). Why did he try such nasty stuff? Thinking it strange, I went upstairs to join the class.

Japanese major cigarettes around 1938 were Shikishima, Asahi, Hibiki, Tsubasa, Hikari, Cherry, and Golden Bat. I wondered which brand he smoked?

In 1940, because of an aversion to the enemy language, the names of some brands were changed: "Cherry" to "Sakura," "Golden Bat" to "Kinshi" with a respective rise in price.

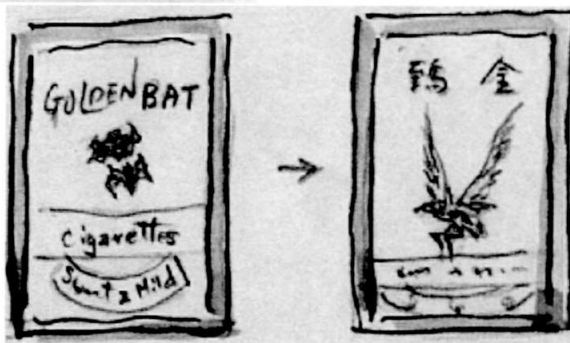
On December 8, 1941, when I was 12, the Pacific War broke out.



In its initial stage, Japan swept away everything in its way. But we saw a gradual shortage of materials, tobacco placed under the rationing system in 1943 with a further price hike.

(2)

In April 1942, I passed the entrance examination to Second Okayama Middle School. I had to submit



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the necessary documents including a letter of guaranty from someone in the area.

Some suitable person? No uncles, no aunts in Okayama. I consulted my elementary school teacher, Mr. Horiuchi, who told me to ask his friend, Mr. Yoshitomi.

I visited Mr. Yoshitomi's house accompanied by my mother. He had been kind enough to give me interview guidance before the entrance exams, but when it came to the letter of guaranty, he showed unwillingness, saying that he would be troubled if I should smoke in the future and be confined to my home. This was the second time I heard the term "disciplinary confinement." Mother, feeling miserable, left his house, her eyes tear-stained. Did I strike him as such a bad boy?

I went to Mr. Horiuchi for advice again. He kindly asked Mr. Yabe, a gym teacher at my new school, who was willing to say: "I'll



see to it." With his consent, the entrance procedures were finally completed.

During the first and second years, I did not smoke,

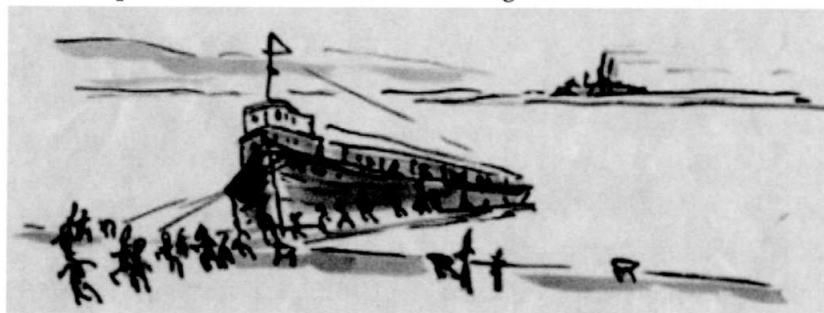
nor did I want to. We had some days without school to help families of soldiers at the front with rice and wheat harvests. In the field, if I had taken a fancy to smoke, I could have done so in secret, but I didn't.

On another occasion, in the first term of the third year, we went to the Tobacco Monopoly Office to perform labor service by carrying tobacco leaves. I could have smoked as much as I liked, if I had wanted to, for the tobacco supply was inexhaustible, but I felt no temptation. Down with the words of Mr. Yoshitomi I had heard upon my entrance to middle school! How he dared to say it like that, dubbing me a delinquent! A fit of anger surged up within me.

(3)

At the beginning of the war, Japan achieved many brilliant successes but now it was waning to a turning point. There were defeats in the Coral Sea and off Midway Island. Troops marched elsewhere from, or more accurately, evacuated Guadalcanal. Whole garrisons died gloriously like smashed gems, or more exactly, were annihilated in Attu, then in Saipan.

The summer of 1944 saw the execution of the Students Mobilization Law. At the age of 15, we were ordered to stop school and work in Kurashiki Aircraft Manufacturing Okayama Factory (now Kuraray Okayama Factory) located at the mouth of the Asahi River. From Kyobashi Bridge in the city center, we went there in a small ship called the Asahi-maru floating down the river about an



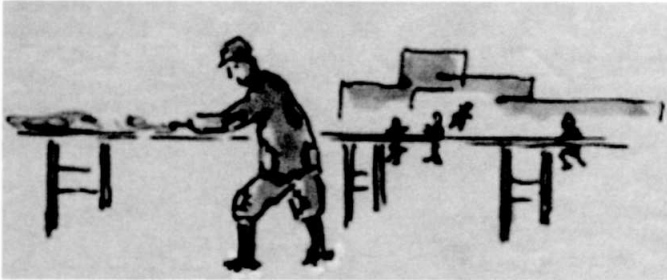
Factory's Wharf hour. To our astonishment, the factory was making wooden navy planes.

Whether my class teacher (then called a student supervisor) decid-

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ed on the job or the factory's personnel did, nobody knows. I was in Class A but put into a group of toughs and delinquents from Class B—their initials: A, H, K, K, N, O, O, O, S. The group was assigned to the Wood-Processing Section and engaged in the work of planning boards and rafters under guidance of drafted carpenters.

There we saw a variety of materials: cypress, cedar, pine. . . . At first we learned how to whet plane blades from carpenters. Next, how to plane wood boards. We did it at the worktable. The repetition of the same work every day wore out the right-hand pockets of our coats, making them hang down like regimental colors. Our future was in the dark, our present in feeble light. School lessons already abandoned, we were absolute workers.



Was it around this time that we started smoking? Each of us stole his father's ciga-

Wood-Processing Works rettes or tobacco and brought them to the workplace.

The first stage in smoking was called “kingyo” (Goldfish)—puffing out all the inhaled smoke. The next stage was to draw into the lungs about one-fifth of the smoke, choked with coughs. Then one-fourth, one-third...gradually the quantity that we could inhale increased. Dizziness and displeasure for a while, then our curiosity was whetted. In about a week, we could inhale all the smoke.

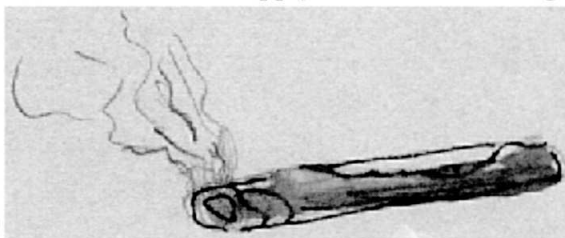
A youth has a wolf in his stomach. We visited the refectory twice at lunchtime. A bowl of boiled barley and rice with potatoes and beans. One bowl per person was the limit, but we managed to take another. Our hunger quenched a bit by smoking; we smoked before and after lunch.

One day we had overtime work. As it was very late, we decided to pass the night in the factory—to be more exact, stay at the workshop and sleep in the wood shavings. We had no cigarette then.

“I am wondering,” asked someone, “if we could ‘smoke’ these shavings.”

“Ok, let’s try,” said the rest.

Pine, cedar, cypress. . .an inexhaustible supply! The smoke along with some fire got into our mouths. Inhaling hard was not the way. Softly, slowly. . .that was the point. So many in the world, but no one rolled shavings to light and smoke them. We bragged about this eccentricity.



In the meantime, we became habitual smokers. Cigarettes were scarce, so we did not cast them halfway but smoked them to the very end. When our fingertips got nearly burnt, we used something like a needle to piece what was left of the cigarette and shared it among friends—each enjoying a couple of puffs. We dubbed this last past “true taste.”

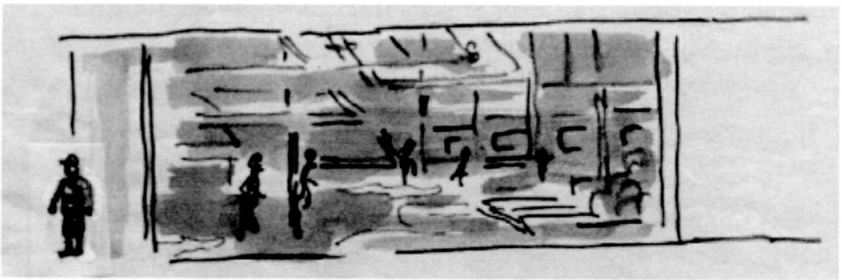


We kept fag-ends to undo them and make “new” cigarettes. An opportunity to learn the enemy language would never arrive again. We tore up English dictionaries and rolled the “leftover” in the paper to “manufacture” new



products that required great efforts. We were first-rate craftsmen.

One day Mr. K brought some curious oval-shaped Mongolian cigarettes and gave them to us. We acquired bean-cakes and alcohol from the Research Institute of the factory, which made possible a triad—eating, drinking and smoking. The factory had a basement which provided a good place for our delinquent behavior. There, always in the gray-colored steam from the factory boilers, bluish smoke and our figures floated like shadow-pictures.

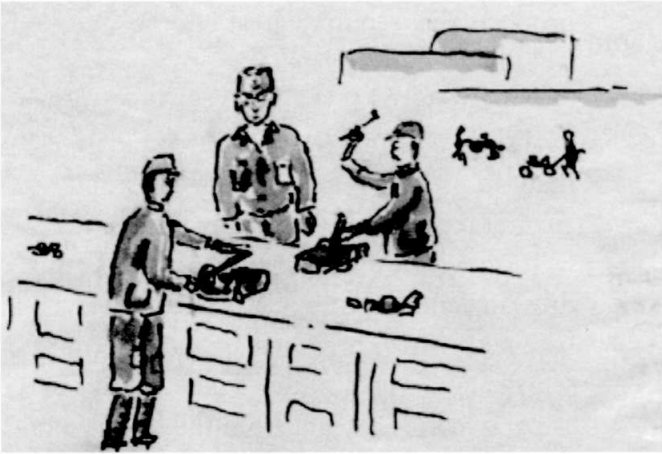


Wood-Processing Works Basement

Around January 1945, we wood-workers numbering ten were transferred to the Sheet Metal Works. Bidding Farewell to the world of wood, we entered the world of iron, where we made aircraft parts by using lathes, rasps and cold chisels.

We worked with Kosakuhei (navy workers). One of them tightened the control of me with these words: “Don’t loaf. Don’t loaf around.” I was not even free to go to the lavatory. Behind Kosakuhei stood a high-ranking officer carrying a bludgeon—a “Navy Spirit Infusing Club.”

Sometimes the Kosakuhei were ordered to form a line and clench their teeth for blows on their buttocks. Did this lead to



Sheet Metal Works

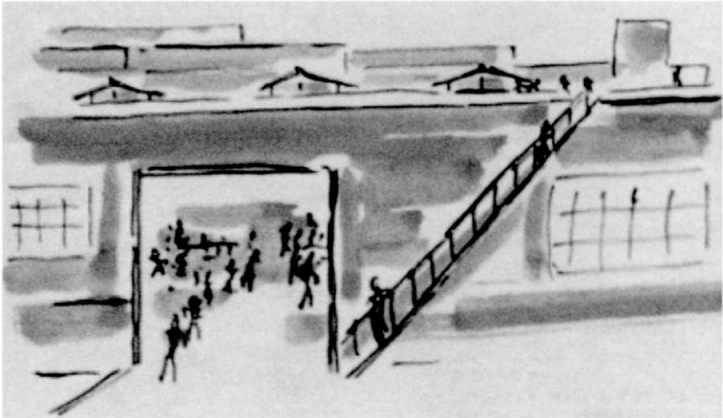
bullying the weaker such as myself working under their strict control?

For diversion, we escaped to the roof of the works where there was a loft—a good place to smoke. Even on the air-

raid alarms, we didn't get in the shelter but ran up to the roof to enjoy smoking in a world of our own.

(4)

One afternoon, in a corner of the Sheet Metal Works, I happened to find a

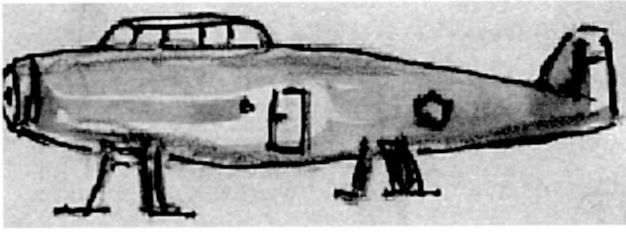


Sheet Metal Work's Roof

plane—only its body without its main wings. I had often seen wooden wings in the Assembly Works, but it was the first time to see the body. We were informed vaguely that it was a navy training plane, so we did not know its type and name.

At that time I chanced to be with Sen-ichi Akiyama (commonly known as Sen-chan) who had been working in the Sheet Metal Section since the mobilization.

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Which of us, I can't remember, either he or I suggested: "We don't have to go up on the roof. Let's get

into this plane for a smoke."

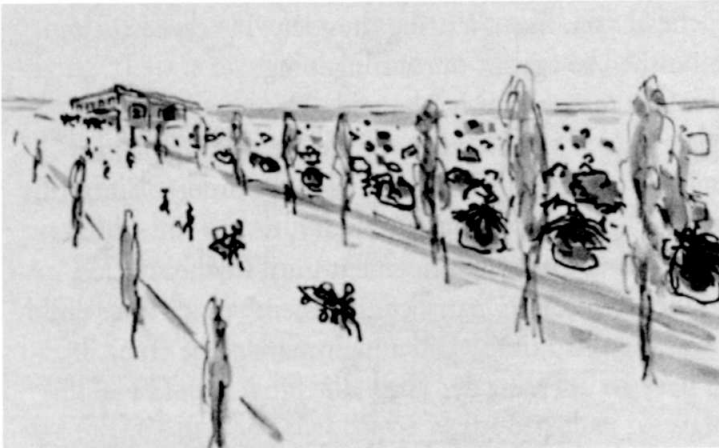
We entered the plane. Inside were metallic bones covered with duralumin boards—a dark and quiet space suitable for a smoke. We lit a cigarette.

After a couple of puffs, there came a voice from the tail: "Hey, what are you doing?"

Who can it be? Nobody else can be inside! We held our breath.

An employee approached from the dark and shouted: "What a nerve you've got to smoke in the place! Get out! Go to the section chief, Mr. Sakakibara." He opened the door and dragged us out. "This is a workshop. First, go to the section chief rather than the school supervisor."

It couldn't be helped. We were caught in the very act. No alternative but to do as we were told. Through a throng of employees and fellow students, the two of us, with drooping hands, went out



the east exit and plodded along the poplar road to the QI (twin-engine all-wooden plane) Assembly Workshop

QI Assembly Workshop

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where the chief had come on business. We went into the office dragging our heavy feet.

"We smoked in the plane in the Sheet Metal Works," we confessed what we had done.

"We were caught, scolded by an employee and were told to come to the section chief."

"You fools!"

He struck us on the head all of a sudden. We were still 16-year-olds of small build; we were knocked down. Each staggered up, then another blow. We staggered back again, then straightened up.

"You are still students. What a disgrace that you should do such a thing! I've never heard of a minor smoke in the plane and a war-



plane at that."

Clenching our teeth, heads down, we listened to his sermon, with its rhythm, severe and gentle, like a mine explosion,

like a beneficial rain, like a roaring thunder. He earnestly and repeatedly admonished us against our wrongdoing.

"I can't leave this matter as it is," he said. "Now we are in a national emergency. In this sacred factory we are making planes according to military orders, that is, the Emperor's orders. Since this happened here, first I'll report it to the military, not to the school authorities. You're disciplinary confinement until further notice."

I had heard the term "disciplinary confinement" twice since childhood and this was the third time. Did a nightmare come true? Did Mr. Yoshitomi have an unerring eye after all? How should I apologize to Mr. Yabe?

In the meantime, a "Kempei" (military policeman) came. Each of

us was made to enter a separate room.

“Why did you smoke,” he grilled me, “in the sacred works, in the sacred plane?”

What I did was a fact. I admitted it. I did not receive cruel treatment for confession but I was at a loss for an answer to the question why I had smoked.

“Your school will send in a petition for your release,” continued the Kempei. “You can’t remain a middle school student. Now is a critical time! If you switch to a military school and devote yourself to the country, your delinquent behavior will be erased. If not, give up your school and be a general worker.”

Many students from our school had gone to the Military and Naval Academies but we two would be boy fliers, not officers. By now, Japan was in the final phase of the war with the situation not in our favor. Officers and men were the same. They would die sooner or later.

The circle of entreatment spread with our rough friends at its center. Our class teachers came to know this situation. My teacher, Mr. Ueda, and Sen-chan’s teacher, Mr. Nakahara, frantically negotiated with the military police for our release.

Mr. Nakahara with an anti-war thought talked with the military, saying “This is merely a childish smoking case,” but was rather scolded because he had long been watched as a leftist. Mr. Ueda was not a leftist but was believed to be a man of free thought only on the grounds that he was a teacher of English—the enemy language. He entreated, but the military would not budge.

We apologized for our misconduct and heartily thanked teachers and friends for their many kindnesses but we were completely caught in the hands of a destiny beyond human control.

The military thought it better that we two should be separated, one to the east, the other to the west. Sen-chan to Tsuchiura, Kanto. Me to Kanoya, Kyushu.

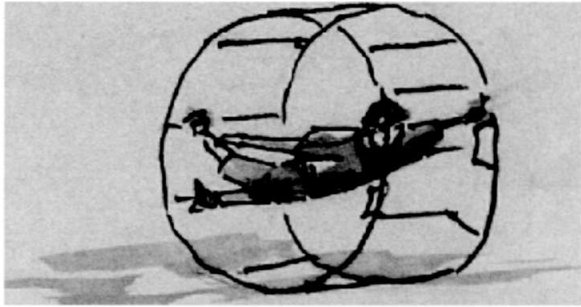
I did not know what became of him. The military authorities forbade our mutual correspondence.

(5)

In Yokaren (Navy Pilot Training School), there were 4 classes: A, B, B' and C. In 1945, the application was reduced and the training period shortened. I was qualified to apply for Class C—a six-month crash course.

Every day for a couple of months, severe training continued. Practice rather than theory mattered. Acrobatic exercise to increase our sense of equilibrium. Long-distance races to develop endurance....

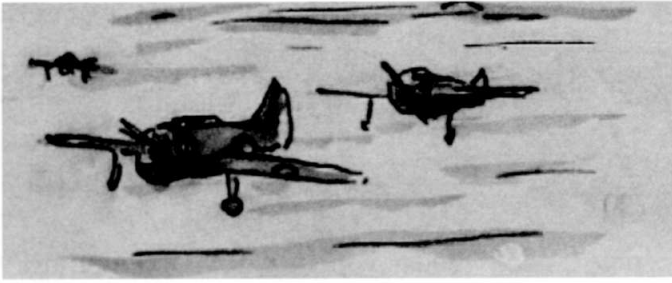
Smoking regulations were very strict there. Smoking was never allowed not only in the plane but also in the hangar, on the apron and in the plane line. No smoking 24



hours a day except in the command post and waiting room. Was it because of the gasoline we used?

When I was a student, I had smoked in a plane where even a regular navy man was forbidden to. Even though I would not reveal my past misdeed, deep down I felt proud that I had done what no one else could do.

Being a minor still, I could not smoke in public, but some teachers tacitly approved it. One day after lunch, I had a smoke in secret and then came out to the open, where I found a pudgy plane—the same type as I had made in the factory. An officer stated, “This is a Shiragiku (White Chrysanthemum).”



Was it only three months ago that I had been caught in the act while smoking with my friend in

the plane and ordered to give up school? It was a turning point in my life. I wondered how all of my classmates were getting along. Still smoking on the roof of the Sheet Metal Works?

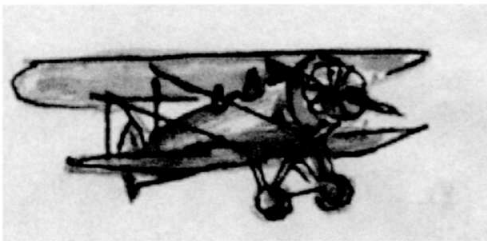
Before long, I learned Shiragiku was a Tokkoki (special attack plane) by which your fliers carried out suicide-bombing missions. Originally, 780 metal planes were produced. Because of their slow speed, they were despised by the enemy as “turkey shoot” in the Battle of the Marianas. The number of Shiragiku decreased. A type with cloth moving vanes—ailerons, rudder, elevators—took its place. Then a further shortage of materials led to the development of a type with main wings made of wood. It was the same as the metal plane in terms of speed and power. Since they were Tokkoki planes, metal or wood, either one would probably shot down before accomplishing its mission.

As usual, Lady Nicotine lived in me. Days of smoke-love passed along with severe training. When out of cigarettes, I opened my mouth beside seniors smoking in public, and inhaled the smoke they exhaled. When teachers were around, I inhaled through my nose without opening my mouth.

When I thought of this way of smoking, Sen-chan’s face came to my mind. What kind of way did he find?

Our training plane was they type nicknamed “Red Dragonfly.” The front seat was for the trainee, the rear seat for the instructor. First of all, ground training was conducted. The plane checking procedure, engine starting, taxiing—this practice took only three days.

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Then came the take-off and landing practice. The instructor, with his eyes all the sharper, gave repeated scoldings from the rear seat. Trainees had more rebukes

even after the practice session. “Today you were not concentrating!” “No baby play, mind you!” “You lack strength!” “You’ll never be a good pilot!”

The scolding words were the same every day. The training increased its vigor day by day. After two weeks of the flights with instructor came the solo flights. We received directions through a radio from the instructor on the ground.

The chocks taken away, I moved to the starting point. The engine roar became louder. The plane increased its speed. Not being heavy, it took off in a minute. Houses, paddy fields, cars flew away. Wind pressure was severe on my face. The plane rose up bit by bit with great power. The roar grew less loud. On the left ahead, the airfield was seen. The runway drew close. Bang! Bump! Thump! I landed! Duration of light: five minutes.

Pilots had to be trained rapidly through a repetition of drills and thrills. Though lots of time and expense had been used to train previous pilots, we were inexperienced fliers who would be sent to the front as quickly as possible.

Most fliers could take off but not land well—especially on the carrier. I heard a child-like greenhorn salute, an officer saying, “I can leave the ship but not land on the deck.” It was enough if they only could take off to launch a ramming attack against enemy ships with 250 kg bombs! There would be no returning.

(6)

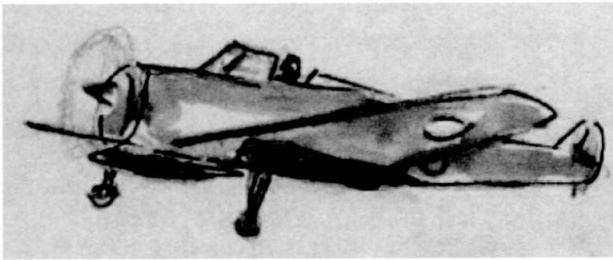
The war situation deteriorated: In the battles of Midway, the
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Beyond the Bluish Smoke

Marianas, Leyte, our combined squadron had a deathblow, we learned. If things went like this, the situation would be beyond recovery by ordinary measures. A drastic step had to be taken. Japan had no choice but to launch a ramming attack on a large scale—"one plane against one ship." Even the training plane was to be used in combat. Thus the Shiragiku Tokkotai (special attack unit) was organized.

Shiragiku which was not suitable for a swoop had to approach an enemy ship at a super-low altitude (less than 100 m.) to avoid the enemy's radar. Just before the strike, it was to rise and make a gentle descent and then dive into the enemy position. With a view to its powers, Shiragiku's strategy was to take off at midnight and dive early in the morning.

The highest speed of Shiragiku was 226 kph, but with two 250 kg bombs loaded, its speed went down to 200 kph. That was why night flights were carried out.



Could such a heavy plane take off? Slow Shiragiku, heavy Shiragiku! When the runway's tip was a hollow, the plane, even after

running the whole way, sank for a second and disappeared. Then it came into view again. It made it!

The Shiragiku Unit was not accompanied by any escort planes which were normally used to confirm the battle results. A Shiragiku flier had to recognize his target and report to the Base before starting his suicide strike. In the case of a warship, he radioed the signal: "Seta...Seta..." then sent a long cord: "Tsu..." pushing the tapper down. When the radio transmission stopped, it was time of his strike, the time of his death. "Hota...Hota...Hota..." for the enemy

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carrier; “Yuta...Yuta...Yuta...” for the troop ship. The communication abbreviations were decided beforehand.

According to statistics, the number of Tokkoki planes, both army and navy, which sortied to the Okinawa front from April through June 1945 was estimated at 2500, of which the navy planes classified by type were as follows:

Zero fighter (631), the 99 type bomber (135), Shiragiku (130), Suisei (122), Ginga (100), the 99 type attack plane (95), scout plane (75), Ohka (54), Tenzan (39), the 96 type bomber (12)

Total: 1393

This shows, setting aside the Zero fighters, how many training planes Shiragiku took part in the Okinawa campaign.

(7)

Satsuma Fuji, Mt. Kaimondake (922 m.), soaring across Kagoshima Bay was Tokkotai's last point of farewell. Here they banked their planes.

The farewell to Kaimondake was their farewell to the country and also to their families.

Before the sortie, I thought, I would climb the mountain—not by an ordinary zigzag route. The most beautiful way to climb Kaimondake would be to climb it straight and alone—the most lovely line I could draw on my life's canvas with no better way of expressing my love and respect for the mountain. This would be my “note” to leave behind.

The ordinary path was supposed to take one hour and a half, but the straight climb was filled with a number of obstacles: bushes, fall-

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en trees, rocks, gullies and ridges.... After four hours of struggle, I reached the summit.



There I gathered stones and built a little cairn for my own sake. The stubborn

fighting was over. On the mountain my feelings of melancholy and loneliness were veiled in the mist. Abruptly, on my lips were several lines of “Snowy Night” by Toshihiro Tanabe:

Men live, though in despair,
beyond a space of time, somewhere
in the place we never can find.

White snows that stay upon a height,
gleam, whatever the light,
to guide a man who is quite resigned.

(Trans. by MN)

These were the echoes of the mountain’s words which seemed to give some direction to my life. I lit a cigarette wet with sweat. Good! The freedom to relish it now! For a moment I forgot my status—a Tokkotai pilot destined to die in a few days. Instead, I thought of myself smoking on the sunny roof of the Sheet Metal Works or rather in the basement of the Wood-Processing Works, for I was in the mist where nothing could be seen.

I mused over memories of the days when bluish smoke faded into the dark space filled with whitish steam in the factory's basement. Are those friends still smoking? Still drinking alcohol with bean-cakes? Still fighting with other groups?

On the other hand, I pondered over the days of labor. We worked—worked like slaves. Worn-out clothes, worn-down Geta (clogs) which looked like Zori (sandals). One friend lost his fingers on a sewing machine. Another had his fingers injured on a lathe.

My fellow fliers began writing their farewell-notes to their families. One of them wouldn't write, saying "Writing to my parents will cause them trouble, which will shake my resolution."

Another said, "If I write, I'll have to go through the senior officer's inspection. I can't lay bare my heart."

The majority were writing. Some wrote Tanka poems, long letters to their parents. I took a quiet attitude.

Some one asked, "Why don't you write?"

"I already did," I said in my mind. "My message is the mountain-climb I did yesterday."

At last, order was issued: "Write your message and hand it in."

What should I do? Pondering with composure, I had to so much to write about. Only one sheet of paper was not enough. I intended just to write "Note" and leave the rest blank and then sign my name. But I remembered Victor Hugo's letter to the publisher and wrote like this: "?!" Hugo had written "?," feeling anxious about the sale of his book and received "!" which told him that sales were good.

In my case, I thought "?" shows my anxiety—whether I can reach the enemy ship successfully at a low altitude, while "!" means that I finally made it. But deep in my heart "?" was a question of slow Shiragiku as a special attack plane and "!" was an act of desperation to my destiny.

"What's this?" asked an officer. "You wrote nothing about your

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parents.”

“It’s Shiragiku’s brave flight toward an enemy ship and finally hitting my mark,” I answered.

“Hum...well...”

He probably felt how I was burning with Tokkotai spirit. I was praised for the first time.

Slowly I smoked, sending out wreaths of smoke from my mouth. Sen-chan, we often did so, you know, in the factory. Inhaling or rather exhaling. Are you still doing it like this? Wreaths, big and small, floated away. One like a human face gradually changed its shape, looking like a crashed face. The shapes of sorrow finally faded into nothing.



Only a short
span of life
how sorrowful
the dance of
cigarette smoke

(8)

August 15. It cleared up from morning. The sun blazed down on us. Did the last night’s Tokkotai reach its destination? Had about 10 percent succeeded? The sortie order was finally issued: 12 midnight. I arranged my personal belongings. The final chance to smoke. I would relish it. A single day’s life.

How many times and how many cigarettes I had smoked! I inhaled deeply and exhaled. The smoke danced in front of me. After

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exhaling the smoke, I opened my mouth once again and inhaled it or rather ate it. I exhaled again. This I repeated. The bluish smoke became whitish and gradually the color lightened. Though I tried to emit smoke from my mouth, it did not come out. Perhaps it sank into my body. Then slowly I brought the cigarette to my lips for a second puff—a long, long, smoking time.

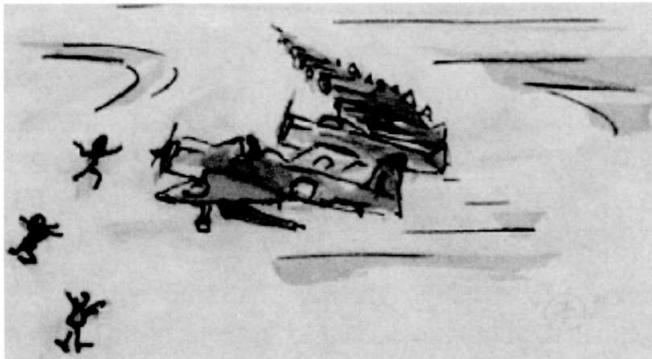
The departure of Zero fighters and bombers was expected in the daytime. The pilots were waiting around the command post, some on the chairs and some on the grass.

“Fall in, fliers!” The pilots rose to their feet and lined up in front of the command post, wearing white mufflers and headbands with the Hinomaru (the rising sun). The summer sun glittered in the cloudless sky.

The commander stood on the platform and gave the sortie order. Sake was served in small flat cups. Each pilot drank his and smashed his cup on the ground. Is it something like a rite of strewing flowers or an act of wiping off earthly desires? The pilots hurried to their planes and climbed into their cockpits and were ready to start. Just when the chocks of the Captain’s plane were removed, an orderly rushed from the waiting room to tell that the take-off had been called off.

Anxious about what had happened, the pilot returned to the command post, where all the officers and men were in great grief.

A rallying cry was given to all.



“The war is over,” declared the commander. “Our country has surrendered to the allied forces. At 12 noon, the Emperor will

make a solemn broadcast.”

All were dazed in dumb shock. Sudden mental relaxation after continuous strain. Until yesterday everyone had been expecting victory. There was something inexplicable in the matter. Something would have to be done.

Just at this moment, several “Gekko” came flying from Atsugi Air Base and scattered handbills appealing for everyone to continue fighting to the bitter end.

Notice to the Japanese People
The Navy Air Force Command

The senior statesmen and the Cabinet ministers who lost their confidence in victory, caught in a trap of the red demon, shielded the Emperor and deceived and derided the nation and at last have issued an Imperial message unprecedented in history. We are thrown into consternation.

The Japanese Emperor is the absolute being. There should be positively no surrender. The Emperor’s Army should never lay down its arms. We in the Air Force have a firm conviction of ultimate victory. Foreign Allied Forces will be stationed in our divine country and execute the Postdam Declaration. It will give torture thousands of times greater than the sufferings borne in the continuation of war. It is as clear as day.

The senior statesmen of injustice and hideous wickedness are being purged by the Imperial Army. Thus, the nation’s attitude should be fully prepared for victory. Now is the time for a hundred million people of this country to stand up.

(Trans. by MN)

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All the pilots had been utterly discouraged. But spurred by this written appeal, they thought they could not let the things as they were, and showed a strong stand toward the do-or-die resistance.

From beyond the whirless blue skies undisturbed by aircraft drones, the dead seemed to press us hard with this questions: "What happened? Why not follow us? Why are you standing idle?"

From somewhere, officers and men got together by twos and threes and shoulder to shoulder began to sing "Showa Ishin No Uta" (Song of the Showa Revolution).



Waves roar at Bekira's¹ abyss.
Clouds fly wild over Mt. Fuzan.
When I stand in the muddy world,
my blood dances with righteous anger.

Men in power, though they vaunt above,
have no heart to grieve for the State.
Zaibatsu², though proud of their riches,
have no mind to think of the State.

(Trans. by MN)

1. theplace where Kutsugen, a

Beyond the Bluish Smoke

Chinese patriot (343 B. C.-
278 B. C.), drowned himself,
weary of the world.

2. big financial combines

Our morale rose, our youthful blood throbbed. But no matter how hard we shouted lifting up our fists, we could not fly the planes. The high-ranking officers including the commander tied us up and tried to break our circle of unity.

My mouth dried up, lips parched. I wouldn't feel like a smoke which I had loved for such a long time.

"Everything has come to end," I told the commander. "Please let me just get in my plane which was supposed to fly."

"Well, okay."

Dragging my weary feet, I made my way to the plane. Getting closer, I found the tires flat. However furious I got, the plane never budged. For fear of our uprising, the commander had told the ground men to let the air out of the tires.

Like a wingless bird I got into the unflyable plane and fell into a dreamy doze.... In proportion to the buoyancy of the dream, the plane was skimming the surface of the sea. Over the crest of the dream, the plane climbed up for a moment. With all the weight of the dream, the plane plunged—into an enemy ship.

In due course of time, the dream returned to the space beyond the bluish smoke I once puffed with Sen-chan in the wingless Shiragiku in a corner of the armament factory.

Afterword

In secondary schools under the former system, there were groups of students: Koha (rough) and Nampa (romantic). I did not belong to either. "Moku" is a slang term for tobacco. Mokuhiro (butt gathering), Shikemoku (out of cigarettes).... In view of my own name,

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Mokuo, and my experience of early smoking, if there had been a group I should belong to, it would have been a group of “smoke-lovers.” But I quit smoking at age 50, more than two decades ago. Now I am a “smoke-hater.”

The former half of this story—from the beginning to the reproof of Mr. Sakakibara—is all based on fact. The latter half is a dream-like fiction. But the Song of the Showa Revolution is what I sang with friends in a corner of the navy plane factory on the afternoon of August 15, 1945.

The sketches on pages 33-43 are drawn from memories of more than 50 years ago, while those on pages 44-55 are all imaginary. As for the active service of the Shiragiku, I referred in part to a former Tokkotai pilot, Mr. Chisato Nagasue’s combat experiences.

With deep gratitude to him.

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