

NAGASAKI

LIFE

AFTER

NUCLEAR

WAR

SUSAN

SOUTHARD

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SUSAN SOUTHARD

VIKING

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For hibakusha in Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and across the world

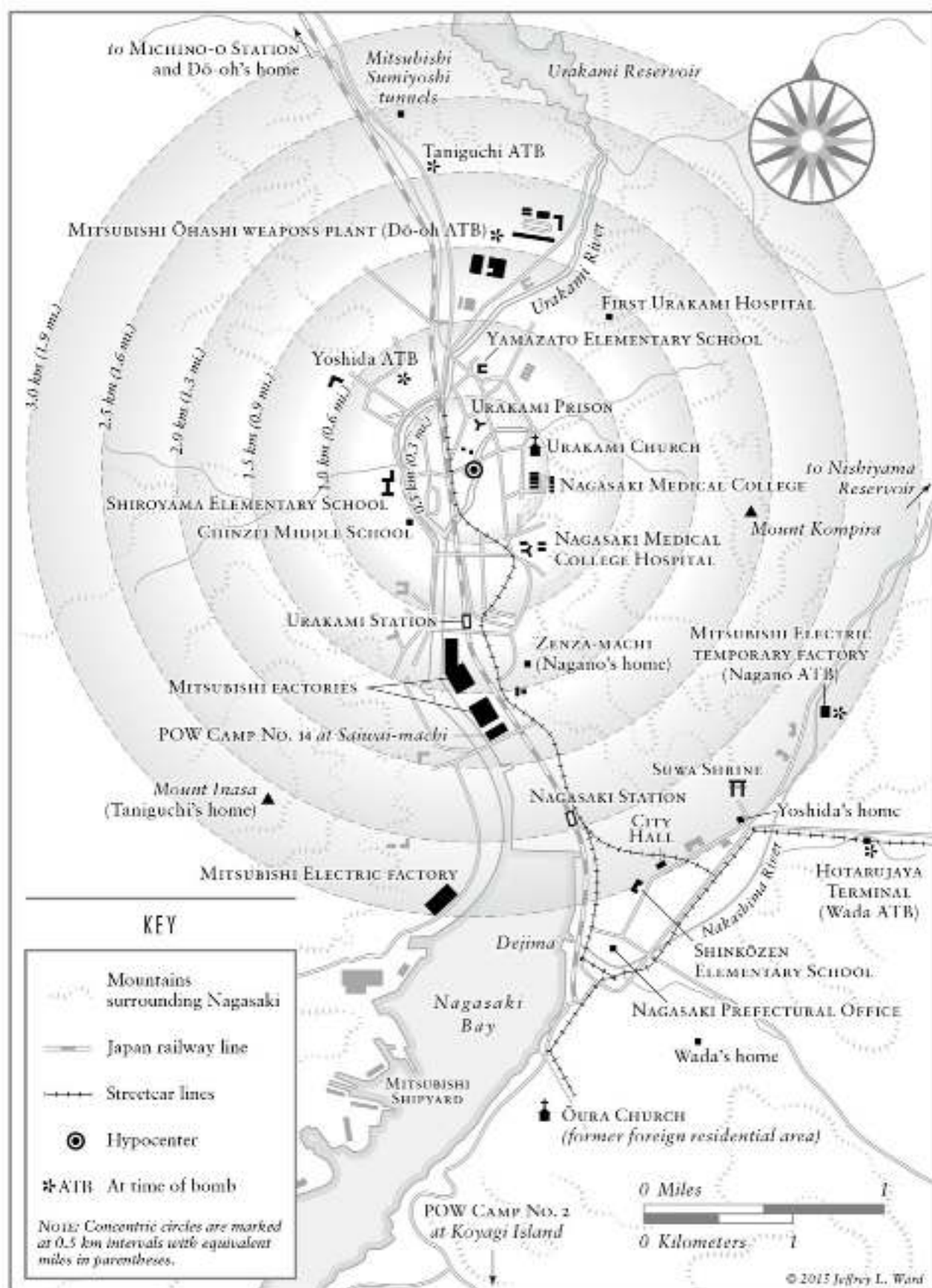
For my parents, Gary and Sue

For Eva—and generations beyond

JAPAN TODAY



NAGASAKI 1945: Scope of Atomic Bomb Damage



PREFACE

In the summer of 1986, I received a last-minute call asking me to step in as a substitute interpreter for Taniguchi Sumiteru, a fifty-seven-year-old survivor of the 1945 Nagasaki atomic bombing. Taniguchi was in Washington, D.C., as part of a speaking tour in the United States. I had just met him the night before when I attended one of his talks. Over the next two days, I spent more than twenty hours with Taniguchi, listening to and interpreting his story in public presentations and private conversations.

Years earlier I had lived in Yokohama, just south of Tokyo, as an international scholarship student. At sixteen, I was placed with a traditional Japanese family and attended an all-girls high school in the neighboring city of Kamakura, Japan's ancient capital. Nearly everything was foreign to me, including the language—and I had little knowledge of the Pacific War and the atomic bombings that had taken place thirty years earlier. Later that year, after my language skills and integration into Japanese life had improved, I traveled to Nagasaki for the first time during my high school's senior class trip to southern Japan. Inside the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, I stood arm in arm with friends who had embraced me as their own, staring at photographs of burned adults and children and the crushed and melted household items on display. In one of the glass cases, a helmet still had the charred flesh of a person's scalp stuck inside.

The memory of Nagasaki stayed with me into adulthood. And yet, as I listened to Taniguchi speak in a dimly lit church hall near downtown D.C., I realized how ignorant I still was of the history of the Pacific War, the development of the atomic bombs, and the human consequences of their use.

Taniguchi was sharply dressed in a gray suit, a white dress shirt, and a deep purple and navy striped tie. On his left lapel he wore a pin—a white origami crane set against a red background. His thick black hair was combed neatly to the side. Small—maybe five foot six—and noticeably thin, he told his story quietly, the syllables toppling one upon another: At 11:02 a.m. on August 9, 1945, sixteen-year-old Taniguchi was on his bicycle delivering mail in the northwestern section of the city when a plutonium bomb fell from the sky and exploded over a Nagasaki neighborhood of about thirty thousand residents. “In the flash of the explosion,” he said, his voice trembling, “I was blown off the bicycle from behind and slapped down against the ground. The earth seemed to shiver like an earthquake.” Although he was over a mile away, the extraordinary heat of the bomb torched Taniguchi's back. After a few moments, he lifted his head to see that the children who had been playing near him were dead.

As he spoke, Taniguchi held up a photograph of himself taken five months after the blast during his protracted stay at a hospital north of Nagasaki. In the photograph he is lying on his stomach, emaciated. Down one arm and from neck to buttocks where his back would be, there is no skin or flesh, only exposed muscle and tissue, raw and red. As Taniguchi finished his speech, he made eye contact with his audience for the first time. “Let there be no more Nagasakis,” he appealed. “I call on you to work together to build a world free of nuclear weapons.”

After his presentation, I drove Taniguchi to the small house outside of D.C. where he was staying. We sat on the front porch; the light from the front hallway allowed us to see each other only in

shadow. I plied Taniguchi with questions about the bombing and the weeks, months, and years that followed. He handed me a small stack of photos that resembled mug shots—medical photos, I presumed—full-body back, front, and side views. They showed Taniguchi, perhaps in his forties, naked except for his traditional Japanese undergarment. His entire back was a mass of rubbery keloid scars. Near the center of his chest, deep indentations still remained where his skin and flesh had rotted, the result of lying on his stomach for nearly four years. It was a time, he told me, when the pain was so excruciating that every day he had begged the nurses to let him die. I asked Taniguchi which memories from his life were most important to him. “Just that I lived,” he said. “That I have lived that long. I have sadness and struggle that goes with being alive, but I went to the very last edge of life, so I feel joy in the fact that I’m here, now.”

By the time Taniguchi left Washington, I longed to more fully understand what it took for him and others to live day by day in the face of acute physical pain, psychological trauma, and a personal history split in half by nuclear war. What kinds of radiation-related injuries did they experience, and what did survival look like in the days, months, and years that followed the attack? And how was it that I, who had lived in Japan and had been educated in excellent public high schools and universities in the United States, had no specific knowledge about the survivors of the atomic bombings? Why do most Americans know little or nothing about the victims’ experiences beneath the atomic clouds or in the years since 1945?

As single weapons, the atomic bombs used against Japan were unmatched in their explosive force, intense heat, and ability to cause instantaneous mass death. Radiation doses larger than any human has ever received penetrated the bodies of people and animals, causing cellular changes that led to death, disease, and life-altering medical conditions. More than 200,000 men, women, and children died from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks—either at the time of the bombings or over the next five months from their wounds or acute radiation exposure. In the years that followed, tens of thousands more suffered from injury and radiation-related diseases. An estimated 192,000 *hibakusha* (atomic bomb-affected people—pronounced *hee-bakh-sha*) are still alive today. The youngest, exposed in utero to the bombs’ radiation, will turn seventy in August 2015.

Many critically acclaimed books have addressed the United States’ decision to use the bomb, but few have featured the eyewitness accounts of atomic bomb survivors. Those that have, such as John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* and several collections of *hibakusha* testimonies, focus almost exclusively on the immediate aftermath of the bombings; stories detailing the brutal long-term physical, emotional, and social manifestations of nuclear survival have rarely been told. As the second city bombed, Nagasaki is even less known than Hiroshima, which quickly became the global symbol of the atomic bombings of Japan. The invisibility of Nagasaki is so extreme that “the bomb” is often expressed as a singular event for both cities, without regard for the fact that the two atomic bombings were separated by time, geography, and the need for distinct analysis of military necessity.

Many Americans’ perceptions of the atomic bombings are infused with inaccurate assumptions—in large part because the grave effects of whole-body radiation exposure were categorically denied by high-level U.S. officials. For years after the attacks, news accounts, photographs, scientific research, and personal testimonies of nuclear survival were both censored in Japan by U.S. occupation forces and restricted in the United States by government request. U.S. officials also constructed and promoted an effective but skewed narrative defending the decision to drop the bombs on Hiroshima

and Nagasaki. Most Americans, relieved that the war was over, easily accepted the government's simplified message that the bombings had ended the war and saved a quarter of a million, half a million, or a million American lives. With wartime propaganda in both nations depicting the enemy as subhuman, and with Americans' fury over Pearl Harbor, Japan's mistreatment and killings of Allied POWs, and its slaughter of civilians across Asia, a common American response to the atomic bombings was that "the Japanese deserved what they got." All of these factors have limited Americans' public inquiry into and understanding of the true impact on the people—nearly all civilians—who experienced the world's first wartime use of atomic bombs.

Compelled by a greater understanding of these historical influences and ongoing questions about the survivors' personal experiences, I traveled to Nagasaki numerous times over a period of eight years. I conducted multiple extended interviews with Taniguchi and four other *hibakusha*—Do-oh Mineko, Nagano Etsuko, Wada Koichi, and Yoshida Katsuji—all of whom were teenagers at the time of the bombing. They and their families also provided me with extensive supporting materials, including personal essays, correspondence, medical records, and photographs. The stories of these five survivors, both epic and intimate, create the primary narrative strands of this book, documenting the seventy-year impact of nuclear war on them, their families, and their communities.

I also interviewed twelve other *hibakusha*, some of whom had never told their stories to anyone outside of their immediate families. I met with Nagasaki atomic bomb specialists, including historians, physicians, psychologists, social workers, educators, and staff researchers at atomic bomb museums, hospitals, research centers, libraries, and survivor organizations. I also studied the written testimonies of more than three hundred Nagasaki survivors as well as privately printed documents, collections, government sources, and thousands of archival photographs of Nagasaki before and after the bombing.

Hibakusha history is a complex and multidimensional story, and there are few straight lines in the survivors' lives. In order to create a semblance of order for their chaotic postnuclear years and the sometimes disparate aspects of their stories, I have arranged the book into nine chronological and thematic chapters, covering 1945 to the present. As the lives of the five *hibakusha* unfold, I document the bombings' larger medical and societal effects, including little-known details of physical injuries and disfigurement, acute and late radiation-related illnesses, extreme isolation during many years of hospitalization and home care, and the numerous challenges *hibakusha* encountered as they tried to redefine normalcy after nuclear war. In the face of societal discrimination and fears of genetic effects on their children, each decided whether to hide or reveal their identities as *hibakusha*, if and when to marry or have children, and whether they would break their silence and talk about their experiences with their families, friends, employers, or the public. Their stories are set against the backdrop of U.S.-Japan relations before, during, and after the war, and are intertwined with the political, social, and economic transformations in postwar Japan, scientific information about the effects of radiation, and evidence of U.S. policies of censorship and denial that continue to affect public opinion and create barriers to understanding. Except for Taniguchi, whom I met when he was in his fifties, I've known these *hibakusha* from their midseventies into their eighties. They provide a rare view of the memories and perspectives of aging adults whose early lives were permanently interrupted by a nuclear bomb.

There were many challenges in taking on this project, not the least of which was trying to write about nuclear annihilation and terror at a scale that defies imagination. My approach was to stay with the

survivors' individual experiences and perspectives as much as possible to keep the story real and imaginable, while offering context for clarification and understanding of larger social, political, and medical issues. In any historical account that incorporates personal narrative, there are complications due to the inherent limitations and unreliability of memory, especially traumatic memory. I countered this by cross-checking survivors' accounts against support documentation to verify or expand on their memories of events, places, and people. Further, I am an American, of another culture and generation than the subjects of this book, and I wanted to prevent potential manipulation or appropriation of the survivors' stories, even more so because they were people who, no matter what the rationale, had already been violated by my country. My answer to this challenge was to use the survivors' own words and images to relay their experiences as accurately as possible, and to draw on the clearest scientific, medical, political, military, and historical analyses I could find to place the survivors' experiences into the larger framework of the various histories in which they played a part.

When I talk with Americans about this book, some of the first questions I am asked relate to the necessity and morality of the U.S. decision to use the atomic bombs on Japan. Many people hold unequivocal opinions that fall on either side of these issues. One of the critical (and difficult) questions to ask is how we as Americans defined then—and define now—just action, the cost of victory, and our criteria for committing to and accepting the mass killing or wounding of civilians of a nation we consider our enemy. Numerous scholars have analyzed and continue to debate U.S. motivations to use the atomic bombs and the relative impact of the multifaceted events leading up to Japan's capitulation, including the atomic bombings. Their work has provided valuable political and military context for the Nagasaki story and provoked questions about the accepted narrative of the bombs' military necessity, especially regarding the need for the second atomic bomb. They do not offer easy conclusions.

In answering queries about the necessity of the bombings, I redirect people to the stories of those who experienced them, without which discussions of the military, moral, and existential questions about the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks are incomplete. At the very least, if we choose to take and defend actions that cause great harm to civilians during war, I believe we must also be willing to look at the impact of those actions. *Hibakusha*—the only people in history who have lived through a nuclear attack and its aftermath—are at the end of their lives, and they hold in their memories stirring evidence of the devastating long-term effects of nuclear war.

The large majority of *hibakusha* do not speak about their atomic bomb experiences, even within their own families. Their memories are too excruciating, and traditional Japanese culture—particularly for those born in the early twentieth century—does not promote public disclosure of personal, family, or societal struggles. Further, the risk of discrimination against *hibakusha* exists even today. Many survivors still keep their identity hidden to avoid being perceived as “different”—or worse, seeing their children or grandchildren denied employment or marriage because of a parent's or grandparent's *hibakusha* status.

A select few—including Taniguchi, Do-oh, Nagano, Wada, and Yoshida—felt compelled to speak openly about their experiences, even though doing so required them to relive the horrors of their childhoods and young adulthoods. On behalf of those who died before their voices could be heard, these five *hibakusha* devoted much of their adult lives to eliminating ignorance about the realities of nuclear war and petitioning nuclear nations to reduce or eliminate their weapons stockpiles. They are

trying, at all costs, to prevent worse nuclear horrors from taking place in the future.

~~As we approach the seventieth anniversary of the second and last atomic bomb attack in history,~~ it is my hope that this book will unveil these neglected stories to a larger audience and help shape the course of public discussion and debate over one of the most controversial wartime acts in history. The stories of those who were beneath the mushroom clouds can transform our generalized perceptions of nuclear war into visceral human experience. “Now, to be A-bombed,” Nagasaki poet Oyama Takami wrote, “[there] is nothing really abstract in that.”

Susan Southa

July 201

A NOTE ON JAPANESE NAMES AND TERMS

I have retained the order in which Japanese express their names—that is, surname first, followed by the given name. For example, Taniguchi Sumiteru’s surname is Taniguchi, so this is the name I use for him. In cases where survivors’ spouses are part of the story, I have deviated from this policy by using the spouses’ first names in order to differentiate them from their husbands or wives. The use of first names in this way would not be typical in Japan. Also, Nagano Etsuko’s maiden name is Kanazawa Etsuko. Because Nagano was her name at the time she told me her story, and for narrative cohesiveness, I refer to her as Nagano throughout the book, including the periods in her life before she got married.

Japanese words are italicized except those that are now integrated into the English language. I have used macrons over Japanese vowels to indicate they have a long sound, except when the Japanese name or term is commonly used in English without the macrons, or when Japanese authors do not use macrons in their names or book titles.

PROLOGUE

Off the eastern coast of the Asian continent, five hundred miles from Shanghai and less than two hundred miles south of the Korean Peninsula, a long, narrow bay carves deeply into the western coast of Kyushu—Japan’s southernmost main island. At the head of this bay lies Nagasaki, acclaimed in Japan for its natural coastal beauty and for being the nation’s earliest Westernized city. In the four hundred years leading up to World War II, Nagasaki was unmatched in Japan for its exposure to European cultures, a result of the extensive amount of trade that took place at its port.

Prior to the late 1500s, Nagasaki was a secluded, loosely bound feudal village of farmers and fishermen, almost completely isolated from Japan’s industrial and commercial center in Kyoto. In 1571, however, Portuguese ships exploring the region made their way into Nagasaki’s harbor. As word spread about its prime location on Japan’s western coast with proximity to numerous Asian nations, more and more European and Chinese merchant ships arrived carrying never-before-seen guns, tobacco, clocks, fabrics, and spices. Within decades, Nagasaki grew to a city of fifteen thousand and became both the center for Japan’s foreign trade and the vanguard of the nation’s early modernization. The Europeans also introduced Christianity to Japan, and for a time Nagasaki was not only the country’s hub for Catholic missionary outreach but also the most diverse city in the region—where Portuguese, Spanish, British, Dutch, Chinese, and Japanese residents attended Buddhist, Shinto, and Catholic services at temples, shrines, and churches.

By the late 1500s, however, the powerful feudal lord Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who was taking control of southern and western Japan and would later help unify the entire nation, became increasingly fearful that such deep infiltration of Christian ideology into Japanese society would result in political upheaval and an ultimate loss of power. In a preemptive strike, Hideyoshi initiated a brutal anti-Christian campaign. Churches were destroyed, and thousands of Christians were expelled, imprisoned, or executed. In Nagasaki, twenty-six foreign and Japanese missionaries and their converts were publicly crucified. Numerous Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines—including the city’s renowned Suwa Shrine—were built to reinvigorate traditional religious practices and to provide a means by which people who did not participate in them could be identified and persecuted. Japanese Christians fought back, leading to violent conflicts between Christians and non-Christians throughout the region. By 1635, the Tokugawa shogunate severed trade ties with Portugal and other Christian nations and imposed a long period of national isolation. Japanese citizens were prohibited from leaving the country, and foreigners were forbidden to enter.

Except in Nagasaki. As a means to preserve a portion of the economic benefits provided by foreign commerce, Japan’s rulers allowed Nagasaki to continue trade with China and the Netherlands—the latter in part because the Dutch had promised not to engage in Christian activities. For more than two centuries, Nagasaki served as Japan’s sole window to the outside world. With Chinese and Dutch ships arriving at their port, the people of Nagasaki were continually introduced to Asian and European arts

In the early to mid-1800s, Russia, France, Britain, and the United States began pressuring Japan to reverse its seclusion policies; in 1853, U.S. commodore Matthew Perry's armed entry into Tokyo Bay forced Japan to formally acquiesce to Western demands and reopen the country to international trade and diplomatic relations. As this small island nation began its quest for political, economic, and military parity with the West, the next sixty years were defined by rapid industrialization, political transformation, and expansion of the Japanese Empire. Japan became a centralized political state for the first time, with its formerly titular emperor now strategically positioned at its head to strengthen the government's authority over the newly unified nation. Rising Japanese leaders launched Japan's first conscript army, established a national education system, and pushed for democratic reforms—including religious freedom, women's rights, and universal suffrage. Over time, however, Shinto was sanctioned as the state religion and politicized to manipulate Shinto's myths and traditions in order to promote concepts of Japanese racial exceptionalism and mandatory obedience to the emperor.

In an effort to achieve military and economic security, Japan emulated Western nations' colonization of East Asian countries by waging short wars with Russia and China, seizing much-needed coal, iron, rubber, and other resources not available in its mountainous terrain. By the early twentieth century, Japan had colonized Formosa (Taiwan), gained territory in Manchuria and Russia's northern islands, and annexed the entire Korean Peninsula, suppressing Korean language and culture. During World War I, Japan provided ships and military supplies to the Allies. When the war ended, Japan emerged as Asia's first world leader, signified by its acceptance as one of the Big Five at the postwar peace conference at Versailles.

Nagasaki thrived. Its port expanded to accommodate increased international trade, and in 1855, a naval training institute was established, a precursor to the Imperial Japanese Navy. Two years later, the precursor to Nagasaki Medical College opened, the first school in Japan to educate physicians in Western medicine. The city dissolved its rules that had earlier confined Dutch and Chinese residents to tiny enclaves near the harbor, so that they, as well as Nagasaki's British, French, Russian, and American residents, were free to live anywhere in the city. By the early 1900s, dams and reservoirs were built to secure an ample water supply, and an expanded railroad system and national road improved accessibility into and out of the city. Nagasaki had also fortified its emergency defense armaments in the event of an invasion, most particularly by Russia. In the fourteen years between 1889 and 1903, Nagasaki's population nearly tripled from 55,000 to 150,000, making the city Japan's seventh largest. After eleven generations of families practicing their faith in secret, thousands of Nagasaki Catholics came out of hiding. Numerous Catholic, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches—as well as Japan's first synagogue and a Masonic lodge—sprang up throughout the city. By the early 1920s, workers and volunteer parishioners had completed Urakami Church, the largest Catholic church in the Far East. With the establishment of the massive Mitsubishi Shipyard and Machinery Works, shipbuilding surpassed trade as the city's dominant industry, and Nagasaki became the third-largest shipbuilding city in the world.



Nagasaki Harbor and environs, ca. 1920. The Nishinaka-machi Catholic Church can be seen in the foreground. (Topical Press Agency/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

In 1926, during the period between the two world wars, twenty-five-year-old Hirohito Michinomiya was crowned emperor of Japan. Following the ancient tradition of assigning an era name (*nengo*) to each new emperor's reign, the time of Hirohito's rule was christened the Showa era (the era of enlightened peace). The first twenty years of Hirohito's reign, however, were anything but peaceful. The emperor's relationship to Japan's military aggression remains a contested issue among historians, but it is inarguable that during his regime, the Japanese military carved out for itself a unique, nearly autocratic leadership role with power to control national policy. To minimize public dissent over Japan's forced acquisition of neighboring countries' resources and labor, ultranationalistic leaders introduced the concept of *kokutai*—defined as Japan's national essence under the supreme guidance of a divine emperor. Patriotism was redefined as compulsory and unconditional loyalty to both emperor and state.

Japanese citizens began living under oppressive policies that restricted free speech and individual rights. Adults and children were required to free themselves of Western concepts such as democracy and individualism, and abide by *kodo* (the Imperial Way), by which they were duty-bound to pursue “moral excellence” as defined by the state. They were taught that because of the benevolent leadership of their godlike emperor, Japan was uniquely positioned to use its superior morality and power to unify and lead all of Asia and the entire world. Japan's Home Ministry and other government

departments established special police forces charged with monitoring the activities of civilians and military personnel who questioned or opposed national policy, a crime punishable by up to ten years in prison.

The Japanese military began new campaigns to expand the nation's empire across Asia. The army invaded Manchuria, where it had maintained a presence since its victory over Russia in 1905, and subsequently colonized the region. The League of Nations protested this action, and in 1933, Japan withdrew as a member, hostile to this criticism and to perceived disdain from the United States and other Western nations over its quest for equal military, political, and social standing. Four years later Japan invaded China to increase its access to natural resources needed both for domestic industrial production and its continued military actions in Asia. As the Japanese Imperial Army Air Forces implemented a massive strategic bombing campaign, Japanese army commanders and soldiers tore through Shanghai, Nanjing, and other Chinese cities, slaughtering, mutilating, or torturing millions of Chinese soldiers and civilians. In 1940, Japan invaded French Indochina and signed a military pact with Germany and Italy to secure the cooperation of the Axis powers in its bid to extend its military, political, and economic boundaries.

At home, the military government tightened its control. All political parties were dissolved, and the Imperial Rule Assistance Association was established—a national communication system that reached every Japanese citizen. In prefectures, cities, townships, and villages across the country, even neighborhood was divided into groups of five to ten households known as *tonarigumi*, which held mandatory monthly meetings to disseminate information from Tokyo, promote solidarity, and unify around the rigid ideals of *kokutai* and *kodo*. In their schools and neighborhood association meetings, adults and children were required to chant slogans such as “One hundred million [people], one mind” and “Abolish desire until victory.”

After years of advancing and holding positions in vast regions of China and the Indochina Peninsula, by 1941, Japan's financial and military resources had worn thin. International protest embargoes led by the United States worsened the country's situation by cutting off essential supplies of petroleum, aviation gasoline, and scrap metals. From Japan's perspective, it had two options, neither of which offered potential for anything but the ultimate demise of its empire. The first was to end the embargo by complying with U.S. demands for Japan's withdrawal from China and Indochina—an unthinkable choice in the context of Japan's political, economic, and military ambitions for Asian dominance and economic independence from the United States. The second: to seize British, Dutch, French, and U.S. colonies in Southeast Asia and take possession of the region's vast oil, rubber, and mineral resources—which would inevitably trigger a war of retaliation with these countries, most particularly the United States.

Japan chose the latter course—and made the additional decision to preempt any U.S. military response by attacking the United States first. On December 8, 1941 (Japan time), amid heightened economic and military upheaval, high-level political debate, and the government's ever-increasing bellicose fervor that gave no value to individual life except in service to the nation, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, a U.S. naval station in Hawaii. A war between Japan and the United States and its allies had begun—a war that quickly spread throughout the entire western Pacific and ultimately led to the destruction of nearly every Japanese city.

Even as late as the summer of 1945, Nagasaki was, in large part, spared.

CHAPTER 1

CONVERGENCE

Before the sun rose on August 9, 1945, eighteen-year-old Wada Koichi slipped on his black wool uniform and visored cap, closed the wooden sliding door behind him, and left his grandparents' house in the Maruyama district of Nagasaki, a half mile inland from the bay. Through narrow, darkened streets, he walked his familiar route through the old city, two miles to the north and east to Hotarujaya Terminal to begin his six a.m. shift as a streetcar operator.

Even in the faint light of daybreak, the city looked largely green. Set into trees and foliage, wooden houses were clustered in small neighborhoods called *machi*. Verdant, low mountains hugged the city in a near circle around the bay. As he walked, Wada passed permanently closed streetside markets, reminding him once again of his persistent hunger. Throughout Japan, fruits and vegetables were scarce, meat was no longer available, and fish was rarely obtainable. Rice, tightly rationed for years, was down to approximately two cups per person per month. To offset hunger, most families planted sweet potatoes in the small gardens behind their houses. That morning, enveloped in fog and near darkness, principals and teachers across the city were already at their schools fertilizing, weeding, and harvesting the potatoes and small number of vegetables they'd planted in every patch of ground they could find. "I thought constantly about food," Wada remembered, "and wondered when the day would come when I would be able to eat until I was full."

Arriving at Hotarujaya Terminal, Wada pressed his signature seal into ink, stamped the work log to document his presence, and stood in line with his friends and coworkers to receive a brake handle and the number of the streetcar he would drive that day. More than eighteen months earlier, the Japanese government had assigned him to this job, and now he served as a leader of the mobilized students working there. Wada walked over to the depot, stepped up into his designated streetcar, and attached the brake. Another young worker boarded as well to collect fares and distribute tickets. Short but strong, Wada stood at the helm and steered his streetcar out of the terminal toward the first stop on his daily route, Shianbashi—Reflection Bridge—very close to his home, where he had started out that morning.



Wada Koichi (at bottom left, wearing glasses), age seventeen, with other student workers at the Nagasaki Streetcar Company, October 1944. The ribbons on two of the students' jackets meant that these boys would soon be sent to war. Both died in the Philippines. (Courtesy of Wada Koichi)

Surrounded by mountains on three sides, Nagasaki is built along the banks of a long, narrow bay and the two rivers that flow into it. The smaller Nakashima River curves southwestward toward the port through a valley where the city's oldest neighborhoods and government offices have existed for centuries. The Urakami River flows north to south through the Urakami Valley, a narrow fertile region filled with rice paddies and farmland until it was incorporated into the city in 1920. Near the harbor, Mount Inasa, Nagasaki's largest peak, overlooks both valleys, the shipyards that line the bay, and the residential districts south of the Nakashima Valley. To the far south and west, the blue of the ocean and sky stretches to the end of sight.

In 1945, Nagasaki's streets were not yet paved, and buildings rarely rose higher than three stories. Streetcars serving Nagasaki's 240,000 people wound through the city on tracks, their wires connected to cables strung between electrical poles lining the roads. Churches stood throughout the city, the bell towers of Urakami Church rising higher than the rest. Numerous steel and armament factories were situated to the north and south of the main port, and two prisoner-of-war camps operated within the city limits—one on Koyagi Island near the mouth of Nagasaki Harbor, and the other just north of the port in an abandoned spinning mill at the Mitsubishi Shipyard Saiwai-machi Plant.

As the sun broke over the horizon, Wada steered his car north past Dejima, the former site of the Dutch trading post during Japan's two hundred years of isolation. At eighteen, he was old enough to

remember a childhood before Japan was at war, when he had played with British, Chinese, Russian, and American diplomats' children. "I thought they were just like me," he remembered. "Sometimes I went to their homes, and the American and British mothers made cakes. The Chinese families made delicious buns. But the Russians gave me black bread"—he winced, laughing—"that wasn't so good."

As a child, Wada lived with his parents, grandparents, and younger sister. He and his father, a bar employee, often went to baseball games at the local stadium; young Wada was thrilled whenever the Tokyo team was in town so he could watch its star player, Russian Victor Starffin, pitch at record speed. When he was five, his father purchased a radio, a rare item in Nagasaki in the 1930s. There was no broadcast station in the city, however, so his father mounted an antenna on top of a tall bamboo pole to receive radio waves from Kumamoto. Weather and music programs aired sporadically throughout the day, but the specific broadcast times for sports programs were published in the newspaper, so neighbors arrived uninvited at Wada's house to listen to baseball and sumo wrestling. His parents weren't happy with the crowds, but Wada loved having all the people packed inside his house. "The thing I remember most," he said, "is listening to the 1936 Berlin Olympics when a Nagasaki swimmer named Maehata Hideko swam the two-hundred-meter breaststroke. Everyone cheered and clapped when she won!"

When Wada was ten, his mother and newborn sibling died during childbirth. Two years later, his father died of tuberculosis, a disease that, due to lack of antibiotics and poor living conditions, killed an estimated 140,000 Japanese each year. "All he could do was rest," Wada remembered. "If there had been medicine, he might have lived." Wada's grandparents took over caring for him and his younger sister, but twelve-year-old Wada was overwhelmed: His parents were gone, his grandparents had little means, and Wada was too young to get a job. "Because I was a boy," he recalled, "I was not allowed to cry."

The deaths of Wada's parents coincided with Japan's invasion of China and the beginning of a long period of Japanese military aggression against other nations. Daily routines transformed for every Japanese citizen. New legislation pushed forward by militarist leaders allowed the government to control and utilize Japanese industry, media, and human labor to subsidize the war. In Nagasaki and across the country, munitions factories accelerated output. Gasoline and leather goods were rationed, and later public access to charcoal, eggs, rice, and potatoes was tightly regulated. Radio announcements—underscored by rousing wartime marches—celebrated Japan's battle victories and fed propaganda to the Japanese people about their country's supremacy and its innate destiny under the emperor to become both emancipator and guardian of all of Asia. To quash Japan's earlier support for democratic principles, the government introduced intense military indoctrination, social restrictions, and rigid mandates of personal behavior. Every household was required to display a portrait of the emperor and empress. Elementary schools were now called national citizens' schools. At school, children were trained to praise their country's military successes in China and were instructed to write letters of encouragement to soldiers. In Nagasaki, Chinese cultural festivals held in the city for centuries were canceled, and Nagasaki Station became the scene for enormous crowds cheering and waving flags as young soldiers were sent off to the front. Under tight security and hidden from public view, thousands of workers at the Mitsubishi Shipyard and Machinery Works built the seventy-thousand-ton *Musashi*—at the time, the largest battleship ever made.



Nagasaki Station, the hub for trains entering and leaving the city, ca. 1930. (U.S. Army Institute of Pathology/Courtesy of Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum)

In August 1941, the Japanese Ministry of Education released *Shinmin no michi* [The Way of Subjects], a manifesto that condemned the West's world domination throughout modern history and commanded the Japanese people to embrace a vision for a new world order ruled by Japan's benevolent emperor. The proclamation contextualized Japan's invasions of Manchuria and China as steps toward a world restored to peace based on Japanese nationalistic moral principles. Japanese citizens were pressed to purge themselves of "the evils of European and American thought," acquiesce to a systemized military state, and demonstrate absolute loyalty to the emperor by forgoing their individual needs and desires. Even as they felt the impact of the U.S.-led embargo of oil and other natural resources, many Japanese supported the government's refusal to withdraw from China, particularly because a withdrawal order from the prime minister would have likely resulted in his assassination.

But the Japanese people could not have imagined their country's next step. On December 8, 1941 (December 7 in the United States), Prime Minister Tojo Hideki stunned the nation when he announced in a live radio address that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor, initiating a war against the United States and its allies. "The key to victory lies in a 'faith in victory,'" he said. "For 2,600 years since it was founded, our Empire has never known a defeat. . . . Let us pledge ourselves that we will never stain our glorious history."

Fourteen-year-old Wada heard the announcement on his father's radio. As a child, when Japan was invading China, he had dreamed of enlisting as soon as he was eligible. Before her death, however, his mother had taught him that "Banzai!"—the Japanese battle cry in the name of the emperor—was

wrong. Hearing the news of his country's attack on Pearl Harbor, he now "questioned a little whether Japan was truly fighting to save people in the world." At that time, protest was severely punished, so Wada kept his misgivings to himself. Meanwhile, Japanese soldiers battled farther into the Chinese interior and simultaneously raced into U.S., British, French, Australian, and Dutch-held territories in Southeast Asia, fighting against inevitable loss at the hands of a far more powerful enemy.

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It was, in the words of historian John W. Dower, a "war without mercy," in which both Japan and the United States promoted racist, dehumanizing language about and perceptions of each other. In the United States, a *Time* magazine article reported that the "ordinary unreasoning Jap is ignorant. Perhaps he is human. Nothing . . . indicates it." Within this climate of racism and political fear-mongering, the U.S. government rounded up and interned an estimated 120,000 Japanese American citizens and "resident aliens" deemed high risks for espionage and sabotage. In Japan, American and British enemies were portrayed as terrifying demons, and everything "Western"—including literature, English classes, music, and political philosophy—was purged from Japanese education and society. In Nagasaki alone, an estimated twenty to thirty foreign monks, nuns, and priests were suspected as enemy spies and interned in a convent on the outskirts of the city. The indoctrination of Japanese soldiers intensified: Chanting the slogan "We'll never cease fire till our enemies cease to be!" they were trained to believe that the destiny of the empire depended on every battle. Military personnel were forbidden to surrender or become prisoners of war; they were ordered to kill themselves instead as an act of honor for their families and their nation and to avoid any trace of shame.

Day-to-day life became more and more austere and controlled, focused solely on compliance and economic survival. The government granted stowed enormous contracts for production of weapons and war supplies to Japan's *zaibatsu*—massive privately owned business conglomerates such as Mitsubishi and Mitsui—while most other commercial industries and family businesses were forced to redirect their labor and production to serve the vast needs of the Japanese military. Nagasaki men who lost their jobs because of government closures joined the factory labor teams of Mitsubishi's four major industries (shipbuilding, electrical machinery, munitions, and steel), which now employed an even larger percentage of the city's workforce. Consumer goods disappeared, and messages via radio, newsprint, teachers, and ever-present military personnel pummeled the Japanese people with refrains of "Luxury is the enemy!" and "Let's send even one more plane to the front!"

Over time, nearly every Japanese citizen was required to work for the war effort—an attempt to offset the extreme imbalances between Japan and the United States in both coal and steel production and the manufacturing of aircraft, tanks, and ammunition. Initially, the Japanese government ordered all men not serving in the military to manual labor, manufacturing, communications, and transportation jobs that in some way supported the government's mission. Eventually, young unmarried women, jailed convicts, and malnourished, weakened, and often lice-infected prisoners of war were similarly assigned. Married women were urged to bear as many children as possible to increase Japan's population. Korean and Chinese men, forcibly recruited from their homelands, toiled in Japanese mines and factories; in 1944, nearly sixty thousand Koreans and one thousand Chinese worked in and around Nagasaki, living in minimal barracks near their worksites and eating thin gruel three times a day. On the eighth day of every month—designated "Imperial Edict Day" to commemorate Japan's entry into the war—workers were sometimes given an extra *onigiri*—rice ball—to fuel their determination. To further boost Japan's domestic workforce, "education" was redefined

to include labor service; at first, students fourteen and older were mandated to participate in part-time labor projects around food and coal production. By 1944, the national government ordered these students to cease their education and part-time labor, and work full-time for the war effort. Children over ten were mobilized into volunteer labor corps.

The Japanese people surrendered clothing, jewelry, every possible metal household item, and even gold teeth to help the government fund the war. Most of all, they sacrificed their fathers, sons, grandfathers, uncles, and brothers, sending them off to the front without protest, only to receive their ashes back in small wooden boxes. Publicly they could show no grief or remorse and had to passively accept their neighbors' congratulations for their son's or father's honorable death in service to the nation. Local branches of national women's organizations made care packages for soldiers overseas and *senninbari*—thousand-stitch belts—for new recruits leaving for war, a symbolic gesture to protect them from harm. Every family was required to belong to a *tonarigumi*, through which Japan's military police monitored not only public obedience and resistance but also every individual's private enthusiasm level or "treasonous" attitudes toward the war. Nagasaki alone had 273 *tonarigumi*, each with five to ten families. Those in the minority who expressed disbelief in the emperor's divinity, the government's political ambitions, or Japan's military aggression were imprisoned, tortured, and often killed. Even at work, disobedience to one's supervisor could result in extreme physical punishment.

Eventually, Wada's European and American friends were expelled from Nagasaki, and again he questioned the government's intentions. "I was told that America, England, and Holland were evil, but I wondered how that was possible when the families I knew had such nice parents." It was also clear to Wada that despite Japan's pronouncements of superiority, his life was getting worse. He had been ordered to withdraw from school to work for the war effort and was paid with a loaf of old bread at the end of each day; later as a streetcar driver, he earned only half of what the adult workers were paid. Wada's grandparents sold their kimonos and other precious items for a small percentage of their value. He was always hungry. When his older friends left for the war, he and everyone else knew they weren't likely to return, especially by 1945, when many recruits were "invited" into the kamikaze corps. "I thought something was wrong," Wada remembered. He later wished that he had spoken out publicly against the war. "But to tell you the truth, I was scared. I worried that I might be killed."

As his own draft age drew near, Wada faced a serious decision. Not only was he against the war, but he also knew that if he went away, his grandparents would have no one to support them. In an act of subversive resistance, he deliberately failed his pre-service physical examination. "I wore glasses at the time, which was not an automatic disqualifier," he said, "but at the examination, I pretended that I was nearly blind." Wada was dismissed from military service, but even with a medical justification, he was labeled an antiwar student and was verbally berated, slapped, and beaten, often by police officers. He survived by working overtime, allowing him to double his wages and better support his sister and grandparents, and he spent time with his friends whenever he could. "From the time I was very young, I was not one to give in," he explained. "I had to manage on my own. No matter how hard things got, no matter how difficult things were, there was always tomorrow. If tomorrow was hard, there was always the next day."

On the morning of August 9, Wada drove his streetcar north past Nagasaki Station into the Urakami Valley. Thick white smoke rose from the smokestacks of the Mitsubishi factories that lined both sides of the river. On either side of him, Wada could see thousands of tile-roofed houses huddled close together. More than 150 shops, pharmacies, tailors, and furniture stores were now closed or serving as ration stations. Staircases ascended into the hills, leading to more closed shops and houses with narrow balconies. Nagasaki Medical College and its affiliated hospital stood at the base of the

eastern hills. Farther north, the redbrick Urakami Church with its twin bell towers overlooked the entire valley.

By eight a.m., Nagasaki's streetcars were packed with adults and children heading toward their assigned worksites. Those who couldn't fit into the jammed cars walked—often for more than an hour—to arrive on time for their shifts. Some skipped work to search the hillsides for edible plants and weeds—risking the punishment of having their names posted on a board at their worksite that would identify them as enemy collaborators. As Wada steered through the Urakami Valley, he received word of a streetcar derailment elsewhere in the city that caused him to change his usual route. He had no idea that this accident would save his life.

Earlier that morning, another Nagasaki teenager, Nagano Etsuko, awakened and joined her family in morning calisthenics. “Physical exercises guided by someone on the radio,” she explained. “I really hated it! Even in the winter, my father made us throw open the windows and exercise.” Despite his strictness, sixteen-year-old Nagano loved and respected her father, a small man who, at just over forty years old when the war began, had aged out of the draft and worked instead at Mitsubishi Electric. Nagano felt less warmly toward her mother. “She was a little bit self-centered,” she recalled, “and she was always irritated with my siblings and me.” Still, Nagano appreciated that her mother had taught herself how to make clothes. During the war when clothing was rationed and no fabric was available, her mother had taken her own kimonos, undone the stitching, and made dresses for Nagano and her younger sister, Kuniko. “My friends thought I was lucky.”

Nagano's memories before the war centered on her family—her parents and three siblings—who lived in a single-family home in the Urakami Valley, just north of Nagasaki Station. “My older brother was kindhearted,” she said. “Because I'm his sister, it's strange for me to say this, but—he was handsome. My girlfriends would beg me to introduce them to him, and they'd come over to my house for no particular reason just so they could see him.” Nagano thought her younger sister, Kuniko, was very pretty, with her huge eyes and fair skin, though the two girls often quarreled. Before the war, Nagano sometimes walked to the book rental store carrying her baby brother, Seiji (whom her family called Sei-chan), on her back. “I could stand and read, and my mother wouldn't say anything because she was babysitting.” Their yard was filled with pomegranate, fig, mandarin orange, and loquat trees, and as Sei-chan grew older, he, Kuniko, and Nagano climbed them to pick the fruit and eat it. “Ah,” Nagano sighed, “they were so delicious. We were so happy.”

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