

Kurume History Walks

No.41 War Remains 3 – Air Raids

平和への願い・久留米の戦争遺跡(3) 空襲遺跡編

During the end of the Pacific War, the US forces more intensely launched air raids on civilians from above the Japanese mainland. Kurume City was considered as one of the principal targets in Kyushu, as it had the rubber industry which has been active since that time, a terminus of railroads, and the army's headquarters and facilities.

In late June 1945, Okinawa was occupied. The US forces built a forward bomber base there. Their primary mission was to destroy airfields, cities, and transport networks. In July, they frequently bombed all over Kyushu, including Kurume.

Araki Air Raid

① **Fukutokucho Kurume Plant** (Location: Arakimachi)

- Former Morinaga Food Industry Kurume Plant and Taiwan Sugar Kyushu Plant

On August 8th, 1945, around 11:30 a.m., all of a sudden, two North American P-51 Mustangs flew over the JR Araki station. Circling over, these fighter-bombers persistently strafed a locomotive with four cars and buildings around the station.

The train was hit by the first bombing and stopped throwing out a blast of steam. It was crowded with passengers and American prisoners. The exact number of dead and wounded is still unknown because it was not recorded how many people were brought to local temples and private clinics. For reference, the JR National Railways says that twenty-two passengers were injured, while the Kyushu Medical College does that forty-four dead and wounded visited its hospital.

At that time, the Morinaga Food Industry produced butanol as aircraft fuel. The bullet holes, which is thought to be hit by that air raid, remain on factory buildings and brick walls.



▲ Fukutokucho Kurume Plant



▲ Location of the Araki Air Raid Remains (left) / Bullet holes on a wall of the factory (right)

Kurume Air Raid

2 Fire station and watchtower (Location: Harankogamachi)

On Saturday, August 11th, from 10:16, fifty-three B-24 bombers, which departed from Yomitan airfields in Okinawa, started dropping M76 incendiary bombs around Harankogamachi, Mutsumonmachi, and Hiyoshimachi.

The fire watchtower, constructed in 1937, was expanded and used for observing enemies during World War II. When the first bombing started, the ring was tolled without a pause, but soon it was drowned by the thud of the explosion.

At the Kanamaru Elementary School, the bombing made a large hole in the playground and the wooden school buildings were burned down despite people's desperate firefighting.



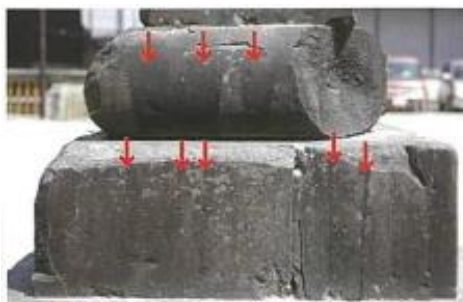
▲ Fragments of firebomb which were taken out from the body whose the one died during the firefighting (upper-left). / Enlarged watchtower during the World War II (upper-right) / Current watchtower (right)

3 Bombed Guardian Dog Statue of Susanoo-jinja Shrine (Location: Jonanmachi)

The first group of bombers dropped eighty-four tons of M76 incendiary bombs, which were 1.5 meters long and 212 kilograms each. The Susanoo-jinja Shrine was attacked and lost its main hall and its portable shrine by fire.

And, a guardian dog statue, which was made in 1842, was hit directly by a bomb and lost its face and a part of its base. The surface turned a dark red by the high temperature of the explosion. Dark tarry oil dripped and its trace remains.

A worshiper carved that history on the damaged face, and today that shows us the misery of the war.



▲ The trace of the bomb strike. The color of the surface changed by heat and the dripping oil ↓. The statue of the guardian dog had been destroyed.

④ Bombed Stone Torii Gate of Awashima-jinja Shrine (Location: Hiyoshimachi)

Incendiary bombs hailed down also on this shrine, which is said to be established by the first lord of Kurume Domain from the Arima family in 1622. A man who lived nearby at the age of fourteen told that the air raid started when he came back home from a working place because the air raid alarm rang. Soon, fire from the next door caught his house, and he tried to quench it with preserved water which immediately dried up. Then, he ran away into a lotus root field.

The main hall was also burned down. The stone Torii, which local worshipers offered in 1897, was hit by an incendiary bomb, and only its two pillars remained. Today it was restored, while we still can see the color change by the heat of the explosion and tar-like adhering matter on the pillars.



▲ The part which changed color (upper-left) and the current Torii (upper-right)

Only the pillars had remained after WWII (lower)



⑤ War Memorial (Location: Kogashiramachi)

Ten minutes after the first bombing, the second bombing started in the central area of Kurume. Twenty-five B-24 bombers dropped 75 tons of bombs in total, which were 300 clusters of 38 incendiary bombs. When they were dropped, they separated into each incendiary bombs, struck the roof of wooden buildings and houses with the heavy rain like sound, then broke roofs, and dispersed flaming greasy globs, and ignited. In an instant, the flame wrapped a town.

A woman, who was fourteen years old at the time, told that she ran with her mother for their life in a burning street. Those who ran around her were all barefoot. Many bombs stuck on the left side of the street, and burnt people were carried one after another on a stretcher. On the other side, there were crying and wounded people in front of burning buildings. She described that the scene was a kind of inferno. Some died in air-raid shelters.

The air-raid continued for twenty minutes. Seven places were burned in the city. Flame and black smoke are said to have climbed to an altitude of 3,600-5,600 meters.

In 1952, a war memorial was erected to commemorate the dead during that air-raid. Since then, the memorial service has been held on August 11th.



▲ A War Memorial, located in the southeastern corner of Kogashiramachi Park

▼ Damage of the Kurume Air Raid

- 212 dead (or 214)

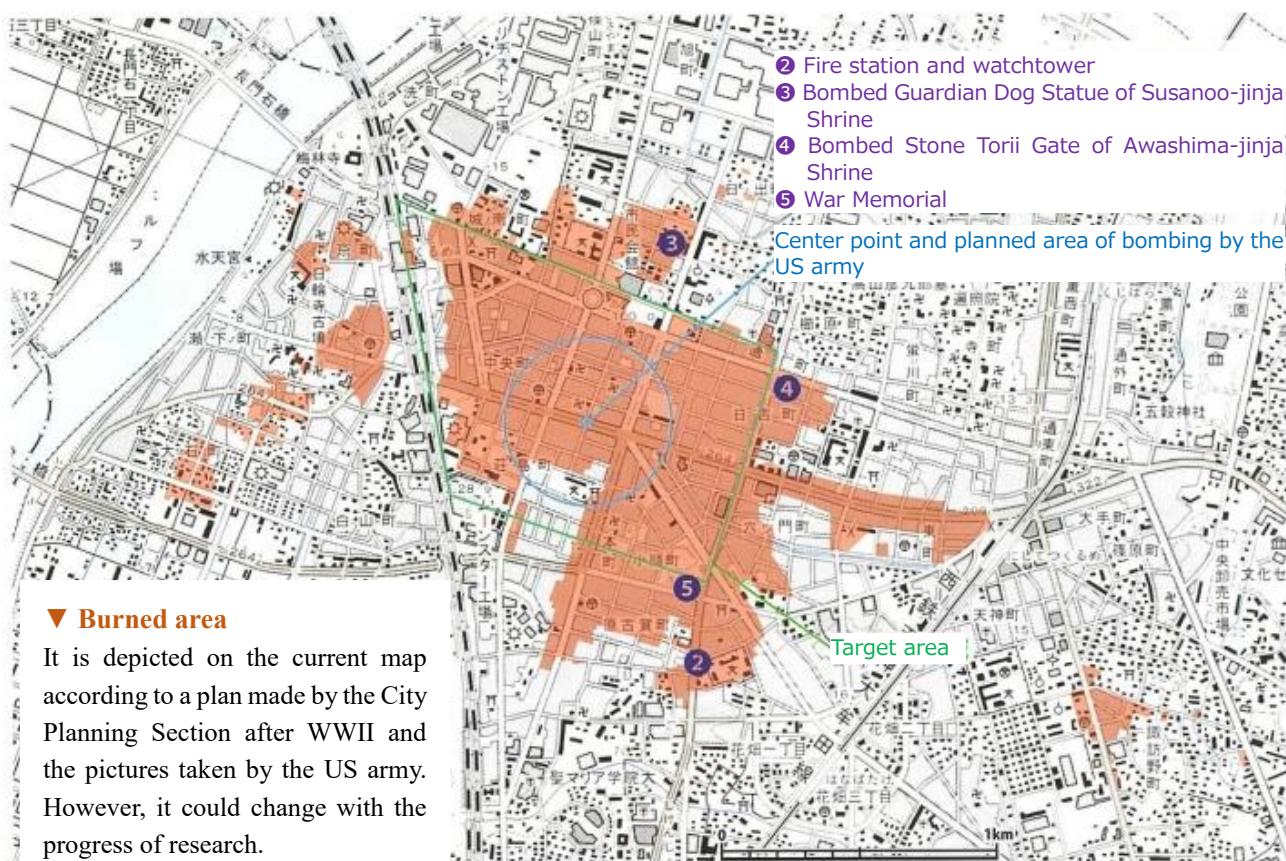
100 in Kanamaru, 62 in Shojima, 18 in Hiyoshi, 4 in Sasayama, 4 in Kyomachi, 4 in other areas, and 17 outside the city

- 67 severely injured, 93 slightly injured, and 16 dead in prison

- 4506 damaged houses (26.5% of all the houses in the city at that time)

- 20023 affected persons (25.9% of all the inhabitants in the city at that time)

- 1,570,000 square meters damaged (5.4% of all the city, 60-70% of the urban area)



▼ Burned area

It is depicted on the current map according to a plan made by the City Planning Section after WWII and the pictures taken by the US army. However, it could change with the progress of research.

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