

Pupil Evacuation during the Pacific War: the Experiences of a Japanese 3rd Grader as Revealed in Family Correspondence

太平洋戦争時の学童疎開

— 家族との往復書簡に見る小学校3年生の体験から —

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Abstract

アメリカ軍による本土への空爆が激化し始めた1944年、日本政府は小学生たちを疎開させる決定を行った。本稿は、1945年4月から同年11月まで疎開していた神戸小学校3年生とその家族の間で交わされた手紙を基に、それらに記されている様々なテーマ、たとえば、健康、食糧、家庭や海外のニュースなど、について調べ、手紙の文体的特色について論じ、戦時下の離別が親子に与えた心的影響について考察している。

キーワード：1. Pacific War 2. Pupil evacuation 3. Family correspondence

Introduction

As the tide of war in the Pacific started to turn against Japan with the defeat at Guadalcanal in early 1943 and as the prospect of U.S. bombers reaching the mainland looked increasingly likely, the government in Tokyo began to review its policies regarding the protection of its civilian population. By the end of the year a voluntary evacuation program had been set up, encouraging families to move from the cities and stay with relatives in the countryside. However, it was not until after the first American air raid on Yawata in June 1944 that the government announced its 'Outline for Encouraging the Evacuation of Schoolchildren'. Under this compulsory scheme, which started in August 1944, over 350,000 third to sixth grade children from elementary schools—renamed 'national schools' in 1941—were evacuated in groups from thirteen major cities to temples, inns and public meeting halls in surrounding prefectures. The evacuation program was expanded in March 1945 to include another 100,000 first and second graders, following the firebombing of Tokyo that month (Havens, 1978).

Were the Japanese government's motives in ordering the group evacuations of schoolchildren entirely altruistic? Havens (1978) has suggested that

Beneath the earnest guise of keeping the education system intact, the state's real motive was to protect the students as a human resource in the abstract, no matter how they or their parents felt about being separated from one another (p. 162).

Whatever the motives may have been for the forced removal of young children from their families, the teachers who accompanied them to the evacuation centers and the house mothers employed to take care of them found that their responsibilities included not only the educating of their young charges but also overseeing their health and morale and ensuring their involvement in and support for the war effort (Yamashita, 2015). In these tasks they were aided by the children's parents, firstly in the form of occasional interviews with the teachers and meetings with their children at the evacuation

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sites, and, more importantly perhaps, through the regular correspondence that flowed between the evacuees and their families. These letters and postcards served, on the one hand, to inform the parents of the daily activities, well-being and state of mind of their son or daughter and, on the other, to retain, for the evacuated child, the link to home through descriptions of the latest family news.

This paper is a study of the family correspondence between a pupil in the third grade at Kobe National School, Kadota Yukiya, and his parents and siblings. Yukiya was evacuated to Shikata Village, Innami County, Hyogo Prefecture from April 4th to November 3rd, 1945, and the correspondence consists of 37 letters written to him by his mother, 25 written by his sister, 7 by his brother, 6 by his father and 20 by Yukiya himself. Between early April and early June only one letter from Yukiya exists and this scarcity can doubtless be attributed to the burning down of the family home in the air raid on Kobe on June 5th. Constant themes throughout the letters to Yukiya are encouragement, the need to persevere in the face of discomfort and the call to study hard, obey the teacher and make a personal contribution to the war through the tasks that he was required to perform. Also apparent, though, is the warm affection expressed towards this 8-year-old evacuee, not just by his parents but also by his brother and sister who were several years older than Yukiya and whose letters express a protective trait towards their younger brother.

The Letters

The early letters from the family show curiosity about the evacuee's new life and a natural concern that the young boy may be experiencing homesickness. This was a common problem among evacuated children, despite pressure to conceal or endure it (Seumi, 1995), and Yukiya's mother, in a letter dated April 19th, urges her son to overcome it through courage and a spirit of self-sacrifice:

There are first graders and third graders in the

public hall, aren't there? I hear there are two first grade children but they don't cry and are behaving well. I was interested when you wrote in your postcard to your brother that you no longer want to return to Kobe having become a child of Shikata. You'll be a good and strong boy. For your father, myself and the people with you that's a happy thought but, even if you feel lonely, try to persevere as we have to live apart a short while for the sake of the country. You understand, don't you? No less brave than our soldiers, let's hold out, you and I ...

You are still small but you are a Japanese child, so to be on the point of tears just because you are an evacuee is to be a weakling, isn't it? Today it's more than sixteen days since you left. Already the godlike special attack units are striking the enemy's aircraft carriers and battleships, one after another, so we on the home front too should be resolute and not fall behind. Whatever our work is, whether studying or helping out, let's do it with all our might.

In a letter the previous day his sister had exhorted him:

Strengthen your body and train your concentration so that you become a splendid child. Then let's win the Greater East Asia War ...

However, a mother's concerns about her child's health and general well-being were hard to suppress. A week earlier, she had written advising him:

After taking a bath be sure to dry yourself thoroughly before getting dressed. When it's cold, wear a lot of clothes; when it's hot, don't wear so many. If you get sick, try not to make your teacher worry about you. Be sure not to injure yourself when playing around. Don't do to your friends what you wouldn't like done to yourself.

Health

At a time when the country was suffering from food shortages and the attendant problem of malnutrition, together with a nationwide increase in the rates of child mortality and tuberculosis (Partner, 2007), it is not surprising that health issues appear frequently in the letters. His mother warns Yukiya at the end of May:

When you catch a cold, it's easy for you to get pneumonia so don't be quick to wear clothes that are too thin, like everyone else. If you think it's cold, put on a waistcoat.

She ends her letter with the warning:

It will soon be June, won't it? The rainy season is a time when illnesses can easily break out, so let's take care and try to stay healthy.

A rash that appears on Yukiya's skin can probably be attributed to poor diet and hygiene. Hayashi Masayuki, a teacher who accompanied third grade boys to an evacuation site in Aichi Prefecture, later reported:

We had little to eat and were not able to bathe very often. Small pink spots appeared on the boys' skin, which was filthy with grime. It was a skin infection called scabies (Gibney, 1995:254).

Though we cannot be certain, this may have been the medical condition that affected Yukiya. Other causes for concern to the young boy during his evacuation were problems with his ear and feet, the injury to his brother's ear from a fragment of an exploding incendiary shell, the swollen lymph glands in his sister's leg due to an insect bite, and his father's precarious state of health resulting from kidney disease. (He was to die three years later.)

Food

Rationing of basic foods had been in place for over four years by the time Yukiya was evacuated to the

countryside. While he might escape in Shikata from the worst of the bombing, there was no escape for him and his fellow evacuees from the ever-dwindling shortage of food. This daily struggle for survival was no easier in rural areas than in the cities, as farmers are thought to have held back some of their crop for resale on the black market (Partner, 2007). One evacuee to Miyagi Prefecture remembered later that he was always hungry and would resort to filling his stomach with bowls of hot water (Cook *et al.*, 1992). In the surviving letters Yukiya makes no complaints about the meals that he receives, but food and activities connected with food are frequent topics in the family correspondence. Responding to a letter from him, his mother writes on May 9th:

It seems that you don't have a snack every day so, with you in mind, we have decided that from June we will stop having our bread snack here at home. Japan is now in the middle of a war. However much we want a snack, let's be patient, shall we? Always remember that there are much more pitiable children than you, and try to be patient.

Several weeks later, when the firebombing of their home had forced the family to relocate to the countryside, she writes to Yukiya:

Unlike at home, there are no snacks here so your brother and sister seem taken aback, but it's good training for them.

We learn from her letter of April 29th that one of Yukiya's daily tasks was to go out to pick Japanese parsley and dandelion, and on May 10th she picks up on his remark that dandelion was edible, writing that she will add it to soup:

Last year I mistook it for weeds and pulled it all up. What a waste. If you don't try eating something, you're in trouble when a time of need arises. You didn't like rice gruel, did you? But according to your teacher, your evening meal is rice gruel, isn't

it? So you can eat it when you are hungry. If you stop being fussy about food, you'll surely grow strong. Self-indulgence won't be cured at home, that's for certain.

About two weeks into his evacuation Yukiya started to record the contents of the three meals that he received each day and he continued to note down what was served to him and his companions until the end of May. Throughout the five weeks of his record little variation is observable in his diet. Table 1 shows what Yukiya and his fellow evacuees ate in the week beginning April 22nd. The monotonous and unappetizing nature of the food normally served leads to any exceptions being highlighted. To his mother Yukiya writes on July 21st:

Recently, cucumber, eggplant and tomato are always served as a side dish On Sunday, July 8th, we were given *makizushi*. [sushi rolled in nori seaweed]

A week later he informs his brother:

Yesterday, the 27th, we ate pumpkin as a side dish at dinner for the first time.

Although some substitute food dishes were still being served in late September, there seems to have been an improvement in the food after the surrender of August 15th, as reported by Yamashita (2015) with reference to other evacuation centers. Yukiya tells his sister in October that he ate white rice at breakfast and lunch, while the side dishes at lunch included boiled taro corm, boiled bean curd and beef.

Labor service

The primary reason for the evacuation of elementary schoolchildren to rural areas was ostensibly to enable their education to continue in less dangerous surroundings, but since 1938 schoolchildren had been obliged to perform 'voluntary' school labor service as part of the national spiritual mobilization campaign (Havens, 1978). After June 1943 this service obligation became heavier for children in the third grade and above, and in April of the following year all children over ten years of age were being mobilized for work on farms or in war factories. Yamashita (2015) suggests that officials in the Ministry of Education saw the school evacuations as an opportunity to enhance the 'life training' of Japan's young citizens through physical activities outside the classroom

Table 1

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
April 22	Pickled vegetables Broth	Potatoes boiled in soy sauce Pickled vegetables	Rice porridge Leaf vegetable pickles
April 23	Pickled vegetables Miso soup	Vinegared sand lance [fish] Pickled vegetables	Vegetable rice gruel
April 24	Pickled vegetables Miso soup	Leaf vegetables boiled in soy sauce Pickled vegetables	Leaf vegetable pickles Rice porridge
April 25	Pickled vegetables Miso soup	Leaf vegetables boiled in soy sauce Pickled vegetables	Leaf vegetable pickles Vegetable rice gruel
April 26	Pickled vegetables Broth	Leaf vegetables pickled with miso Pickled vegetables	Vegetable rice gruel Pickled vegetables
April 27	Broth Pickled vegetables	Leaf vegetable pickles Pickled vegetables	Vegetable rice gruel Pickled vegetables
April 28	Pickled vegetables Miso soup	Leaf vegetables and cuttlefish boiled in soy sauce Pickled vegetables	Vegetable rice gruel Pickled vegetables

that supported the war effort. According to Havens (1978), "School rarely lasted more than an hour or two each day. Most students spent their time outside class gathering food for the group or working on the nearby farms as labor volunteers" (p.163). In his letters home Yukiya gives no indication of the contents of his lessons—he merely reports that he is studying hard. The activities he undertook outside the classroom are mentioned in several letters, however. In a letter of May 10th his mother compares the strenuous effort she put into pulling a handcart up to the Kitano area of Kobe—part of her volunteer work bringing basic household goods to war victims—to Yukiya's carrying firewood and assures him that he will gradually become accustomed to such heavy labor. Yukiya mentions to his sister, in a letter dated July 15th:

Yesterday and the day before we carried firewood up the mountain. With the screeching of the cicadas in the mountain it was noisy.

On August 11th he describes to his mother how they were busy weeding the vegetable patch in the mountains when the air-raid siren sounded and they rushed back to the village. In the same letter he tells her that they went for a run after dinner from Shikata to Nishishikata. To his brother on September 22nd he reports on frequent trips to catch loach and grasshoppers, adding:

Yesterday we went to a vegetable patch called Okayama and dug up sweet potatoes to take back. We then ate them steamed for dinner.

In early October part of his time is still spent digging up potatoes, but he laments, in a letter to his sister, how heavy rains had caused the potatoes to rot. Despite the hardships and privations which they surely understood accompanied the evacuee's life, both parents were at pains to emphasize to their son the advantages of life outside the city. Early in his evacuation period his mother had written:

I'm sure the cherry trees, rape blossom fields and wheat fields there are beautiful. The sun must be golden and the air more serene than in Kobe and must be good for your health. Please build up a strong body and become a good child for the sake of the country.

In a similar vein, his father wrote:

It's really nice that you are able to have hikes, pick field horsetail and catch loach. Such things are impossible in Kobe, so being an evacuee you'll get stronger and it's better by far.

News from home

In the same way as Yukiya's letters home served to inform his family of daily life and events in Shikata, the family's letters are also filled with news of what was happening in Kobe, who visited them, who went off to the front or returned on leave, how the flowers and vegetables in the garden were faring and events in the lives of Yukiya's brother (mobilized to work in a munitions factory) and sister (still attending school). It has been suggested (Yamashita, 2015) that, by describing such everyday events, family members were attempting to make the war seem normal to their evacuated children: "Their detailed descriptions of everything they were doing at home to support the war effort offered their children a model of patriotic behavior, with the implicit message to do just what they were doing" (p. 110). Sharing bad news from home was another way of normalizing the war for the young evacuee, and the graphic descriptions provided by Yukiya's family no doubt served to help him empathize and identify with their plight. Soon after the massive air raid on Kobe on June 5th, 1945, Yukiya's sister paints for him a vivid picture of the experience:

The air-raid siren went off just after 7 o'clock in the morning, so we were all eating breakfast. An air raid! This is awful, we thought, and quickly got dressed. We went down into the cellar, of course. We could see a group of about twelve planes

coming. Then they released their incendiary bombs, scattering them about. At once black smoke rolled towards us from the Sannomiya area. The planes came in quick succession, then finally we heard a whistling sound followed by a loud boom and we couldn't see an inch in front of us because of the smoke. I thought, what shall I do? And as I was aimlessly wandering around, Father came to me and we set off towards the fire-devastated area. In this area, too, countless incendiary bombs were falling and there was no time to call out, "One's dropped ahead of you!" or "One's dropped behind you!" Stumbling as we ran, we finally escaped to the church in the firebombed area. When I looked around, I couldn't see anyone beside me. This is awful, I thought, and though I searched, I couldn't find anyone and was about to cry. But finally, Father and Brother came looking for me and I felt such a relief. However, Mother was nowhere to be found and that was a big worry. The three of us searched all round for her and we finally found her in the bomb shelter in our garden. Our next-door neighbor, Ryo San, together with Hiramoto San and a child from somewhere else had been burnt to death. There was a dead sailor outside the shelter. The poor man! His body was a bit hot so I left it to cool down, but within about an hour he had turned completely to ashes. Just about everything had burnt up. You wouldn't say it gave you a feeling of relief, but, as it would have happened sooner or later, he didn't have to wait to be cremated, so it didn't give you a particularly unpleasant feeling. However, those enemy planes do a lot of harm, don't they? If we don't get revenge for this, that uncomfortable feeling inside us won't go away, that's for sure.

Anyway, we've been left homeless, ha-ha-ha ... I may be scolded for saying such a thing and laughing, but let's be patient just for today.

On June 17th Yukiya's mother gives her own account:

On the morning after our enjoyable visit, because of that horrible, horrible air raid, both our house and the school were burnt down. It's a pity, isn't it? It was a really frightening experience for me and I thought my time was up but then I saw your face, with tears filling your eyes, floating before me, and wanting to see you again, I gathered my courage, put up with the pain and, fighting the flames, was at last able to save myself. I'm so happy to be able to write a letter to you in this way. My burns have mostly healed but, because I took a bath, they are a little swollen and hurt, but you needn't worry. When I sit down and stand up it hurts, but this makes me call to mind your rash.

She tells him in a later letter that, on visiting Kobe one month after the fatal air raid, the sight of the burnt-out ruins of their house made her shed bitter tears. Through such accounts Yukiya became aware of the misfortune that had befallen the family and the descriptions probably helped to foster in him a feeling of solidarity. However, he himself was not totally shielded from the brutality of warfare. Writing to his sister on June 23rd, he asks:

Were you frightened during the air aid the other day, on June 21st? The incendiary bombs and other bombs hitting nearby Akashi and Himeji went off with loud bangs so I was a little scared.

One week later, he writes to his brother:

The air raid of June 25th was really frightening, even here in Shikata. While we were in the public hall, an enemy plane fired its machine gun.

Commenting on the intensification of the enemy's aerial attacks, he writes to his father on July 7th:

Lately, there have been a lot of air raids in the evening, haven't there? There was an air raid in the evening of July 3rd, wasn't there? Then, a bomb fell near Hoden Station. Yesterday evening, too, they dropped incendiary bombs on Akashi.

The fears of an 8-year-old boy come through in these letters, notwithstanding the exhortations of the adults to be brave.

War news

Included in the attempts to 'naturalize' the war and ensure that the youngest member of the family was also involved in the war effort were references in the family's letters to the latest war news-information, it should be born in mind, coming from a state-run media in which radio broadcasts were controlled and newspapers severely limited in the opinions they could express. The family make no attempt to hide the perilous nature of Japan's situation in the war by the spring of 1945—perhaps with the aim of preparing Yukiya for the difficult times ahead—and in the first few days of his evacuation he receives a letter from his sister informing him:

Both the northern and southern airfields on Okinawa are already in the enemy's hands. Air raids on the mainland are becoming more and more intense.

On April 30th his brother writes:

The enemy have taken the Marianas and Iwojima and are making a real mess in Okinawa and the Philippines. Let's persevere, the two of us, until the day of victory!!

His mother writes to him on the evening of May 9th:

Roosevelt has died, but the death of Germany's Hitler is a great pity, isn't it? Italy's Prime Minister Mussolini has been shot dead, too. Your teacher has spoken to you about various things in a way easy to understand, so I think you know about this well. Germany has finally lost Berlin and has surrendered, so from now on people throughout Japan—old people, women, children, everyone—will have to renounce themselves, adopt the same spirit as our young gods in the special

attack units and, for the sake of the country, for the sake of His Majesty the Emperor, just destroy the enemy.

By August, however, relating the news that Russia has declared war on Japan, she seems to be preparing him for the worst:

We have to fight enemies throughout the world so you must really be strong. Let's be patient and persevere, whatever painful event happens.

The 'painful event', the decision of Emperor Hirohito to unconditionally surrender following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is duly described to Yukiya in a letter from her dated August 21st:

I think you already know this, having heard from your teacher, but all Japanese citizens wept as they listened to the imperial decree pronounced by His Majesty the Emperor on August 15th. All of us here, too, cried as we sat gathered around the radio. We must now put up with whatever occurs, obey the imperial rescript and live resilient lives.

Private voice, public voice

In the seventy-five letters which Yukiya's family sent him it is possible to detect two distinct tones or voices. One is the personal or domestic—displays of warm affection, of concern for his health, joy in his achievements, the joking banter of a sibling, accounts of home, neighbors and relatives—while the other is public—calls to persevere and be patient 'until the day of Japan's victory', to work hard for the sake of the Emperor, to act selflessly like the young gods piloting the special attack planes. The latter voice has been referred to as "official wartime discourse" (Yamashita, 2015), and another example of it appears in a letter from his mother dated April 13th. Here she comments on a trip which Yukiya's group made to a local shrine and she imagines the prayer he made:

“Please protect our soldiers so that Japan may be able to win through. We, too, won’t cry but will keep fighting!”

Only a few months before Japan’s surrender, she assures her son:

Japan is winning. For sure. Really.

How much of this public voice or discourse in the letters should we take at face value? The spiritual mobilization campaign waged by the government in the late 1930s to generate public support for the war in China had resulted in “a routine of parades, ceremonies, slogans and broadcasts that made it almost impossible to ignore the war. The press was under restraint, radio was completely controlled, and the schools had been gently but firmly bent to serve the state” (Havens, 1978:32). With the government’s propaganda machine at full throttle by the closing years of the Pacific War, the flow of news reaching the Japanese people was strictly regulated. In addition, there was the pressure to conform emanating from the neighborhood associations, whose activities affected people’s lives in so many ways,

facilitating neighbors watching each other and empowering a neighborhood to admonish anyone, whether for letting a beam of light slip out through their black air-raid curtains, for failing to buy their allotment of government bonds, or for showing a lack of enthusiasm in contributing gold rings to the war effort (Cook *et al.*, 1992:171).

In one of her letters, Yukiya’s mother mentions such an incident to him:

Two or three days ago in the middle of the night when the air-raid siren was sounding, the light was on in the house of So San next door, and people from the Tatsuuma Steamship Company broke her back gate and smashed a window on the second floor. It’s really worrying, isn’t it?

Much of the public discourse in the family’s letters to Yukiya seem to show the influence of the many slogans with which Japan was awash at the time, slogans which “less and less reflected reality, as the gap between publicly monitored images and private perceptions widened. ... Each Japanese had a public face which he or she was expected to wear in all public encounters” (Cook *et al.*, 1992:174). Herein lies the key, perhaps, to the presence of these two voices in the family correspondence. It is known that the teachers at the evacuation centers regularly monitored the letters written by the children to family members back home (Yamashita, 2015). By doing so, they were able to check the evacuees’ morale and edit out any sensitive information. However, it appears that the monitoring also applied to the letters *received* by the children. Certain expressions in the mother’s letters, written in a noticeably polite style, indicate that she knew that Yukiya’s teacher was reading them. For example, after Yukiya’s rash ailment clears up, she writes on July 21st:

I’m very sorry to have made your teacher worry so much. Thank goodness you got better soon.

And towards the end of Yukiya’s evacuation, on October 20th, she could indirectly express her thanks to the adults who had taken care of him:

The whole family are grateful for the gift of your teacher’s exertions and your house mother’s efforts.

To a large extent, therefore, these letters were not private but public documents, subject to censorship and, perhaps, self-censorship, and as such, did not necessarily reflect the real thoughts of the authors about the war. They were written at a time when any perceived lack of enthusiasm for the war risked punishment. An additional factor worth considering is that Yukiya’s family adhered to the enemy’s religion, Christianity—his mother writes about the triangular garden in front of their church (Kobe’s

Eiko Church) –and, as Havens (1978) notes, “it was particularly hard to be a Christian in wartime Japan” (p. 68). The parents, therefore, would be especially suspect in the eyes of the authorities and would be wary of departing from the ‘official line’ in anything that they said or wrote.

Conclusion

What can we learn from this collection of family letters and from Japan’s group school evacuation experience in general? Writing fifty years after the end of the war as part of a compilation of the experiences of former Kobe Elementary School evacuees, Seumi Kazu acknowledged that there were those who looked back positively on their evacuation experience as a time when strong bonds of companionship, fortitude and a spirit of cooperation were developed. However, he was keen to emphasize that there were also people who could hardly bear to talk about that time of their lives for fear of resurrecting painful memories:

For them there was an extreme shortage of food, envy at the way meals were allocated, fleas and lice—which affected all the children—and bullying. In a forced manner—‘For the sake of the country’, ‘For the sake of the war’—parents and young schoolchildren had the joy of living together snatched away from them (Seumi, 1995a) [author’s translation].

The pain at having one’s family split apart surfaces in a letter to Yukiya from his father who writes of his extreme loneliness since the evacuation of his son but of the need to patiently endure the anguish. The inability to provide immediate emotional comfort to a young child witnessing a rain of destruction from the air and the nagging worries on both sides of the correspondence when expected letters do not arrive were a constant reality. For Yukiya there was also his concern over the burn injuries that his mother received in the June 5th air raid and his worries over his father’s health. Looking back as an adult on the

fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, Yukiya describes rereading the family letters and encountering again the father whom he lost as a sixth grade pupil and who had been a distant memory for him until then:

Each line of my father’s letters seemed to be overflowing with love for the young child I was then. When I left on the evacuation, rather than the thought of sending his child to a safe place, my father must surely have thought he would never see this child’s face again. With his intense hatred for war, he must have grieved over his own helplessness (Seumi, 1995a : 113) [author’s translation].

Evaluating the emotional impact of the evacuations, Havens(1978) suggests that “Not even the frightful air raids themselves were probably so traumatic as this compulsory detachment of young children from their homes” (p. 162). Takahashi Tomee, evacuated from Tokyo to the countryside at the age of 10, later recalled: “We badly wanted to go home but we were not allowed to complain. All of us sobbed under blankets every night” (Nishigori, 2015). Seumi describes how some Kobe evacuees, as a means of expressing their homesickness, would climb to the top of the hill behind their evacuation center and, when they saw a train travelling towards Kobe, “would call out together in a loud voice, ‘Father, Mother’. By calling out with all our might, we hoped that at least these voices would reach them” (Seumi, 1995b) [author’s translation]. The number of people who experienced the horrors and deprivations of wartime Japan is diminishing with each passing year, yet the letters between Yukiya and his family remain as significant testimony to the suffering that war inflicts upon innocent civilians. As Gordenker remarks:

It’s important for those of us who have never experienced war to learn from those who have. Everyone can relate to the story of the school evacuations because we’ve all been children.

That's why the story has such a power to teach (Gordenker, 2004).

With power to teach and, perhaps, power to warn against the danger of repeating the errors of the past, these family letters bear witness to war's cruelties but also to the endurance, strength and warmth of the human spirit.

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