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# Hiroshima survivor testifies

By BILL AKERS

Moments before the bomb was dropped, 15-year-old Francis (Mitsuo) Tomosawa was standing in formation with a large group of high school students, listening to the exhortations of their foreman. It was the daily pep talk at the supply depot where he and the other youths worked. As they were being urged to give their best for the war effort, the Enola Gay — a huge, silver B-29 named for the pilot's mother — and an accompanying B-29 were making their run toward the heart of the sprawling port city. It was a few minutes after 8 o'clock on a hot, clear morning. It was Aug. 6, 1945. These were the dying moments of Hiroshima and nearly 180,000 people. (Three days later, another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, raising the toll to nearly 200,000.)

Now, almost 37 years later, Tomosawa, a Watsonville optometrist, relives that day and the days and nights of unimaginable horror which followed. He tells of the thousands streaming out of the city, their clothes burned off, flesh hanging in shreds, "the raw meat showing." He tells of the street car full of sitting and standing people — all of them dead; of the rivers clogged with bodies of people who plunged into the water seeking surcease from their agony; of the footprints burned into a bridge, a ghastly reminder of the people who were standing there when the bomb went off; of the shadows left behind on a fragment of a wall by the people who were sitting there at the moment of that awful, blinding flash.

He tell of seeking out his best friend in a hospital and finding him burned beyond recognition. The friend tried to smile at him, "but the smile made him look all the more grotesque." Mercifully, the boy died that night.

To relive that time is not easy for Tomosawa, for when he talks about it, the gruesome sights become real again, as do the moans of the dying thousands and the smell of burning flesh. "I'll never forget that smell," he says, solemnly. Most of the time he puts it out of his mind, but when he does think about it all the emotions he felt then, return. "When I think about it, it's just as if it happened several months ago at most. I remember that peculiar odor." Talking of it, he says, "is not

an easy thing to do."

Why, then, does he? "I feel that God has spared some of our lives and I think God has used us to relate our experiences so people will understand what happened; to tell them they should heed the warnings of what happened ... and not continue along the ways toward more destruction."

That was the message he carried with him to Washington, D.C., where he testified last week in a crowded Senate hearing room before Sens. Mark O. Hatfield, R-Ore., and Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass, co-authors of a joint congressional resolution calling for a nuclear weapons freeze by the United States and Russia.

Invited to speak at the hearing by Sen. Kennedy, he was one of four Hiroshima survivors who testified that day, chosen from among the several hundred who presently live in this country. During the 20 minutes he spoke, he was asked what he would say to President Reagan and Russian President Brezhnev if given the opportunity. Speaking softly, precisely, he said: "I would tell them that I feel God spared us so we could relate to the people that you cannot lightly consider using these weapons ..."

Asked how the experience affected his life, he said, "I'm able to put it aside. I don't think I'm disturbed by it." However, it left him with the firm conviction that all war is wrong, with the possible exception of a defensive war. "Vietnam was wrong," he declares. And, he adds, the responsibility to avoid violence extends down to the individual as well. "It has to start with the individual."

Although he is a pacifist, Tomosawa says he does not advocate the destruction of all our weapons. But he feels no more nuclear weapons should be built and existing ones never ought to be used. "Once they are used, it's the end of life ..."

He says it with the quiet conviction of a man who has viewed what the end of the world may look like.

The morale lecture over, Tomosawa and his classmates were about to go to work in the supply depot when they heard the B-29s overhead. They appeared to be heading toward Tokyo. He explains that at that time, the high school students had been mobilized to work for the war effort. The children in the lower

elementary grades had been taken into the city to help tear down the wood-and-paper houses as a means of limiting the effects of the fire-bombing raids. He said he learned later that 10,000 people from outside Hiroshima had been brought in that day to help out.

Minutes later, he heard the planes again. They had turned around and were flying back toward the center of the city. As he watched, he said he saw two parachutes drop from the leading plane. "I saw something shiny under one of the parachutes — it must have caught the sun — and I saw it drop lower and lower." The parachute disappeared behind a small mountain that stood between him and the center of the city.

"That instant, there was a bright flash," the intensity of which he groped for words to describe. The best he could do was, "It was like a million flash bulbs going off all at once." A split second later came the force of the blast. He was blown 20 or 30 feet and knocked unconscious.

When he came to, he saw that all the buildings around him were flattened. He looked toward the city and saw the huge mushroom cloud rising toward the sky. What he could not have known at the time was that the intervening mountain had saved his part of the city from the full effects of the heat, blast and radiation, but the results were horrible enough as it was.

He was put to work rescuing the dead and injured trapped in the buildings until he and the other youths were released to go find their own families. As he walked the mile or so toward his home through an area ordinarily teeming with people, he encountered only two.

"It was a young mother with her baby in a carriage. As I came closer I saw she was almost naked — her clothes were burned off. She was bleeding. Her baby sat in the carriage and stared straight ahead. There was a gaping wound in the baby's cheek, with a stick sticking out of it. The baby didn't cry; just stared straight ahead. As

I passed, the mother did not realize I was there."

Reaching what was left of his home, he found his mother there, injured, but alive. A town clerk, she had been on her way into the city but missed the street car when she returned for some papers she had forgotten. She told her son she had taken his best friend, burned beyond recognition, to the army hospital a block away. They went back there to find him. "The hospital was filled with burned and bleeding people. We had to walk between and step over the bodies, and finally we found him. I didn't recognize him."

There was a steady stream of people, "hundreds and thousands of them," coming out of the city toward the hospital, walking with bent knees and their hands and arms extended limply forward so as not to touch other parts of their bodies. They were naked and so savagely burned it was impossible to tell which were men and which were women. He remembers that despite

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Dr. Francis Tomosawa remembers Hiroshima

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# Hiroshima survivor

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their hideous wounds, he never heard anyone scream. "It was so sudden, so devastating, maybe we lost our sense of feeling," he says. At the hospital, the few medical people did what they could, but they had nothing to work with. As the bodies accumulated, they were put into a field and burned.

The moans of the injured and dying coming from the hospital kept him awake that night, he recalls. He said he climbed up by the chimney of their house and looked toward the city. "The whole city was burning." The next day, he climbed up there again for a look. "The city I knew the day before was all gone. It was a desert — a desert of death." As far as he could look, he said, there was not a living soul to be seen. Even several weeks later, when he walked the three miles into town to where the city hall had been to sign up for relief supplies, "I didn't see a single living creature, not a dog, not a cat, nothing."

On the way, he saw many bodies of people who had stuck their heads in the cement water troughs people had built as defense against the fire bombing. "They had put their heads in to drink, and died."

The seven rivers which flow through the city were lined with bodies of people who had gone there to drink and for relief from their burns. "They clogged up under the bridges."

In the coming weeks, the people spared from the blast but who had gone into the center of the city to help, began to die. "What we didn't know about, was the radiation."

When asked how he and his mother survived those

initial days after the blast, he replied: "I don't really remember about the food. We probably didn't eat for several days. When you saw all those burned people ... you didn't have much appetite."

Tomosawa's message today is that it is useless to prepare for a nuclear war. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima was just a small one, he says. The bombs today are hundreds of times more powerful. "There would be no functioning hospitals. Even if you stored medicine away, you couldn't use it. The medical profession realizes it would not do any good to prepare. It's just not practical."

Tomosawa harbors no bitterness over what happened. "When you make war, a president must perform his duty. I harbor no animosity except for one thing. I wish, maybe, that President Truman had first warned the government of Japan, and then exploded the bomb in a non-populated area. They had the ability to do that. Let the (Japanese) government check that out, and then warn them if they didn't surrender, they would use it on the cities."

But, he concedes, had that happened, perhaps the world would not have had an example of the horrors which are wrought with nuclear weapons. "When I speak of this, I recall all the heartache and horror. My hope is that by doing so, all the people in the U.S. will realize the destructive power of nuclear weapons, and that somehow we will use our power as citizens and not let this happen again. If we do this, then those people will not have died in vain."

What about getting the message across to Russia? "That's a tough question," he says, for which he has no answer. "I just feel that both sides have enough weapons to destroy the world."

Tomosawa brought out a thick book the Japanese published which illustrates in the most graphic ways imaginable, the horror that was Hiroshima. As he leafs through the book, he points to pictures of hideously burned bodies. "That's how they looked," he says quietly.

In the front of the book, there is a picture of a child's face, with its wounds and staring eyes. Opposite is this legend: "We wish you, and the children, and fellow human beings of the world, to know what happened that day as seen through the eyes of this child."

Francis Tomosawa was an American citizen when he was in Hiroshima that day. He and his two brothers were born in Hawaii to parents who were legal resident aliens there. He, his mother and brothers had gone to Japan, in the custom of the day, for education that would enable them to preserve their language and cultural heritage. The plan was to return in two or three years to the father who had stayed in Hawaii, but the outbreak of the war intervened.

After the war, Tomosawa and his brothers did return. He and one brother volunteered for the U.S. Army and served in Korea in that war. Tomosawa later went to the school of optometry at UC-Berkeley, and came to Watsonville in 1964 to establish a practice. He and his wife, Lillian, have two children.