THE POSTMAN OF NAGASAKI

Peter Townsend

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SUPER EDITION

By the same author

EARTH MY FRIEND
DUEL OF EAGLES
THE LAST EMPEROR
TIME AND CHANCE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
THE SMALLEST PAWNS IN THE GAME
THE GIRL IN THE WHITE SHIP

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This book is dedicated to Sumiteru Taniguchi
and Peter Townsend in heaven.

SUMITERU TANIGUCHI
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AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On my first visit to Nagasaki in 1978, to do some research for an earlier book, I questioned two survivors who were children at the time of the A-bomb. It was a painful and moving interview, most sensitively handled by the interpreter, Mrs Rumiko Shimozuma, of the Nagasaki Prefecture Foreign Affairs Department. From her, I understood for the first time something of the agony of Nagasaki.

The idea of a story about Nagasaki came to me that day. On subsequent visits to the city and during the intervals between, the project, thanks to Rumiko's interest, slowly became reality. I am deeply indebted to her for her invaluable help and the warm hospitality of her home and family.

My researches in Nagasaki began early in 1982. The two big problems were, of course, language – which means interpreters – and witnesses – finding the ones who could tell me about all aspects of the A-bomb. In both these areas, the response of the people mentioned below was unreserved. I am particularly grateful to those who invited me to their homes or, in other ways, showed me such warm hospitality. During several weeks spent in Nagasaki, I walked for scores of kilometres, trammed, bussed and boated for hundreds more, in order to find these kind people and to follow up the information I had collected from them. At the end of it, I can say, with the millions of visitors who come yearly to the city: 'I love Nagasaki.'

I wish especially to thank the following:

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Mr Tadashi Kokurawa.
Yasuko, his daughter (second generation A-bombed).
Miss Mayumi Okabu, her friend (second generation A-bombed).
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to talk with me at length about 'The Nuclear Dilemma' and to give me a copy of his paper on the subject, in which he pleads the cause of the nuclear 'deterrent'. One of my objects in this book is to suggest that, if the deterrent is ever used, it will be the end of us and our planet, Earth.

Philip Ziegler, my editor at Collins, London, for his most helpful suggestions.

Dana Noyé, my daughter, Marie-Françoise, and my son, Pierre, all had a hand in typing the manuscript, filled as it is, with unfamiliar Japanese names and English technical terms. I thank them warmly for their painstaking work.

A final and heartfelt acknowledgement. It so happened that, hardly had I begun my researches in Nagasaki in April 1982, than I received news that one of my family was seriously ill. I am profoundly grateful to my friend Monsieur Henri Pigeat, director of Agence France Presse, Paris, and to Monsieur Bolo, the agency's correspondent in Tokyo, for their successful efforts in locating me.

I left Nagasaki next day, 6 April. Air France Flight 273 brought me home over the pole to Paris. I shall never forget the sympathy and the practical help shown to me by the staff of Air France on the ground at Osaka, Tokyo and Anchorage (Alaska), and by the flying and cabin crew, during the anxious hours of the long journey home. In August, I returned to Nagasaki.

1

Sumiteru Taniguchi was only one year old when his mother Kiku died. Though her disappearance had no meaning for him at the time it would later be heavy with consequence – not so much because it deprived him of her maternal care, as because his father, Sadamichi, took him and his brother and sister from their home at Fukuoka, on Kyushu, the most westerly of Japan's four main islands, to live with their grandmother in Nagasaki, sixty kilometres away. Sadamichi then got a job on the railways in Manchuria, the furthest-flung province of the Japanese empire, and he too disappeared out of the life of his young family. It was left to their grandmother to rear the three children: Keiko, then a girl of seven, Teiji, a three-year-old boy and the infant Sumiteru.

Nagasaki was unlike any other town in Japan. It was a port; in 1570, three and a half centuries before Sumiteru arrived, Portuguese ships had put in there. From Holland, China, England and Spain came more ships and in the wake of the seamen and traders there followed Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries; among them one of the greatest in all Christendom, Francis Xavier. Though Buddhism had reached Japan from China centuries earlier that did not deter the Christian missionaries from preaching salvation through Jesus Christ to the Japanese.

They had gathered many sheep into the fold when, in 1579, the Japanese government reacted. Twenty-six Christians, missionaries and Japanese converts were condemned to death. On Nishizaka, a hill in Nagasaki facing the harbour, each martyr was hoisted on a cross, then run through by the spears of the

soldiery. The massacre only brought more converts to Christianity.

Infuriated by their zeal, the Shoguns, Japan's feudal rulers, ordered further killings. The soil of Nishizaka ran with the blood of hundreds more Christians until, banned altogether in the mid-seventeenth century, the church went underground. During the next two hundred years, the Christian message was passed on by word of mouth, from generation to generation.

Meanwhile, by command of the shogunate, Japan was cut off from the outside world. Foreigners living there were expelled and all others forbidden, on pain of death, to enter. Only one port in the whole country was exempted from the order: Nagasaki. A few Dutch and Chinese traders were allowed to stay on and for the next two centuries, while the rest of Japan remained rooted in feudal law and customs, Nagasaki flourished. Thanks to its continuing contact with Asia and the West, foreign culture and science, technology and consumer goods had access to the port.

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century, with the accession of the emperor Meiji – 'enlightened Rule'– that Japan began to emerge from isolation and feel the impact of the West. In Nagasaki, Christianity came out from the shades and re-established itself in the form of the beautiful wooden gothic Church of the Twenty-six Martyrs, on the hillside at Oura, overlooking the harbour. Now that other ports became accessible Nagasaki had to surrender its exclusive relationship with the West. The Dutch and Chinese lost their special privileges as traders from other nations installed themselves in the city. However, business flourished; in 1859 a British consulate was established – in a temple, for want of other accommodation.

In Nagasaki, that year will be more remembered for the arrival of a twenty-one-year-old Scot, Thomas Blake Glover. Some say that no man contributed more to the modernization of Japan. Through his initiative young Japanese were sent to Britain, where they studied everything from the constitution to the building of ships. If Glover's ties were closest with Mitsu-

bishi, industries as varied as coal-mining, coin-minting and the railways all profited from his enterprise. Thanks to him, too, the English rose made its début in Japan and his Japanese wife, a talented artist, familiarized the West with her paintings of that exquisite species of flora surnamed 'Japonica'.

Close to the Church of the Twenty-six Martyrs, Glover built a mansion, surrounding it with a spacious garden. From there, on the hillside at Oura, he could survey the comings and goings of the ships and merchandise which were the source of his fortune. When he moved to Tokyo, it was as adviser to Mitsubishi, the driving force of Nagasaki's industry.

Considering all that Glover had done for Japan – or more exactly because of it – the fate of his son, when war came, was to be a cruel one. Oddly enough, it was in some way bound up with the fate of Sumiteru.

2

Half way down the steep slope of Mount Inasa, the highest of all the green hills which descend upon Nagasaki and its harbour, there stood, in the early thirties, a small wooden house. It was the home of Sumiteru's grandmother, Taga, whom the children called Oba-chan. In future it was to be their home as well and Inasa, with its varying moods, a presence and an influence in their lives.

Mount Inasa, considering its altitude of only 330 metres, hardly deserves to be called a mountain, but it is the only prominent summit jutting up from the line of hills on the western side of the long valley in which Nagasaki lies. Towards the east, the hills climb to other summits, the most graceful being Konpira, but Inasa has no rival, least of all when the rays of the setting sun are diffused behind its darkening silhouette. There are few places in that elongated city from which Inasa is not visible; it is the hill most familiar to the citizens of Nagasaki and the most loved. From the top of Inasa, the view takes in the whole of Nagasaki, from the harbour entrance northwards to the head of the valley where the town dwindles away. To the east, beyond Mount Konpira, the skyline is punctuated by other heights: Tenjiku, and Hoba, Hoka, Atago and Hoshitoriyama, the 'star-gatherer' – a spectacular panorama of tree-clad hills with the city and its long, narrow harbour enclosed among them.

Nagasaki lay exactly north-south along two main axes: the Urakami river and a long, straight road which was nameless, like all other roads and streets in Nagasaki, but identified as 'Route 206'. Down from the hills in the north the Urakami flowed into the city through a pleasant valley where Christians

congregated and built, with their own hands, an imposing cathedral; it took them thirteen years. The Urakami river then changed into a nondescript water course, its banks reinforced with stone, for when swollen with heavy rain, it would come hurtling down, bringing with it débris, which might include carts and motor-cars from flooded homes upstream.

In Nagasaki city, the residential areas, with their establishment of hospitals and schools, stood back from the river, reaching up into narrow valleys towards the higher ground; peaceful and pleasant enclaves whose streets in April were adorned with the frail pink of cherry blossom and where, during the hot, humid summer days, the air vibrated with the ceaseless pulsating of a million cicadas. Strung out along the floor of the valley were factories working day and night, turning out weapons and merchandise for Japan and its empire; the biggest of them displayed the red triple-diamond symbol of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. On the northern outskirts of the town, tucked away into tunnels bored into the chalky hillside, was the Mitsubishi torpedo factory, concealed from the air. A little further down the valley where the river, flanked by rice fields, swung south to begin its run through the town, the vast hangars of the company's ordnance factory and the ship-testing tank were ranged methodically on the right bank. Through mid-town the Urakami ran on past the Mitsubishi shipyard factory, the electrical plant, and the steel works with their rows of tall chimneys. A couple of hundred metres away, Urakami station was the last stop on the main line before the terminus at Nagasaki; there, where the train finally stopped, the Urakami river ended too, emptying itself into the harbour. More rail tracks led on from the terminus down to Ohato pier and the docks on the harbour's eastern seaboard, where the ground rose gently out of the Urakami basin to slope down again towards a smaller river, the Niyashima.

This was down-town Nagasaki: quays and warehouses cluttered with merchandise, streets crowded with shops and shoppers, strongholds of local government, like the prefecture

and the city hall and, within a stone's throw, the main post office with postmen on red bicycles coming and going, and the fire station, its red engines and shiny-helmeted crews loitering beside them, waiting for action.

Opposite the down-town area, a kilometre away across the harbour, an array of cranes and gantries advertised the presence of the greatest of Mitsubishi's enterprises – its shipyard. Long hulls, still building, were shored up in dock and others anchored off-shore, elegant monsters beside the stumpy trawlers of the fishing fleet moored at an adjacent quay. Down-town Nagasaki rambled on beyond the docks and along the shore until, abruptly, the scene changed on the rising ground at Oura, upon which stood the Church of the Twenty-six Martyrs and, adjoining it, the splendid mansions built decades ago by Glover and his foreign friends. Against the Japanese landscape they looked as outlandish as did the charming gothic church next door and the Urakami cathedral at the other end of the town. But they left on Nagasaki a certain exotic imprint which distinguished it from other Japanese towns. It was natural that Nagasaki, so beautiful and with its centuries-old associations with Western civilization, should be considered as a town apart; unthinkable that it would one day, in a fraction of a second, be reduced to ashes by a Western power.

3

This was the city where Sumiteru had come to live and the time would come when he would get to know it street by street. Until then he was raised on a hill, close to the earth and the sky, an environment which would create in him, as it did in every other creature living on the hill, a strong instinct for survival. But in his grandmother Oba-chan's house he could never feel far from the city below. On clear days it was easy to pick out the main landmarks in down-town Nagasaki and on the hill at Oura. Immediately below, a few cranes poked out from behind the hill which hid the rest of the Mitsubishi dock-yard.

It was easy to distinguish the ferry-boats plying the harbour, the big steamers berthed at the docks, and even the black and yellow colour of the fishing boats. Occasionally, the moaning of a ship's siren resounded up on the hill at Oba-chan' shome.

A narrow path led down from the house into Nagasaki; somehow avoiding the steepest declivities, it would here and there break into a flight of steps where the slope became too forbidding. There were 150 steps on the way down and of course, on the way up, which was a more serious matter.

Above the house the sheerness of the high ground was to some extent camouflaged by a jungle of unkempt trees and creeper, from which emerged every now and then a clump of tall bamboos looking like ostrich feathers when ruffled by the wind. As the down-gradient eased and the slopes began to lengthen there arose a forest of dark-green pine growing wild except where men, bettering nature, had planted trees, taller and straighter, in long conventional rows. In spring, wild aza-

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