

The Man Who Could Not Take Sides: A Sketch of the Life of Kuraba Tomisaburo

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The leisure facility “Glover Garden” is by far Nagasaki’s most important tourist attraction. Part of what was once the Nagasaki European settlement, the garden is a showcase for the Glover House, Ringer House, Alt House and other nineteenth-century Western-style buildings used by the former residents of the settlement.

The centerpiece is of course the Glover House, a uniquely designed wooden bungalow that was built by Scottish merchant and entrepreneur Thomas B. Glover in 1865 and remains today as Japan’s oldest Western-style building. The fan-shaped roof, stout chimneys and flagstone veranda seem to symbolize the age when Japan was breaking out of the shell of feudal isolation and a few intrepid foreigners were perched precariously on its shores.

Visitors to the garden learn how Glover made important contributions to the modernization of Japan, how he associated closely with the young samurai rebels who grew into the country’s new leaders, and how he died an honored and respected resident of Japan after more than five decades in this country. They also see the statue of a prima donna portraying Madame Butterfly and notice that in some pamphlets the house is referred to as the “Madame Butterfly House.” They naturally assume that there is some connection between Glover’s wife Tsuru and the sorrowful heroine in the opera.

Few of the visitors, however, notice the bronze bust of Glover’s son Tomisaburo, and indeed little space is devoted to his life and work in the pamphlets and signs provided for their information. But if they look carefully they will notice that a strange air of sadness and desolation predominates inside the house, that the rooms and corridors seem empty in spite of all the furniture and decorations.

Whatever happened to the Glover family? Where did they go? What tales of glory and tragedy would be heard if the sculpted mantel pieces, the fireplaces tiled with hand-painted Arita Ware and the thick hardwood floors suddenly began to speak?

The Birth of Shinzaburo

Thomas Glover fathered a son on December 8, 1870. According to the family register preserved at Nagasaki City Hall, the mother was not Tsuru but a woman named Kaga Maki. Nothing else is known about the link between Thomas and Maki (Maki later married a man named Yoshida Jokichi and died in Nagasaki in 1903), but it is likely that Maki was a courtesan with whom Glover engaged in an temporary relationship.

This sort of liaison was by no means uncommon. During the long period of national isolation, Japanese courtesans called karayuki and orandayuki were dispatched by Nagasaki brothels to the Chinese settlement and Dutch trading post on Deshima, respectively. Even after the opening of Nagasaki as a treaty port in 1859, the brothels continued to cater to the foreign seamen visiting the port and often sent their inmates to serve as “maids” for wealthy foreigners visiting or residing here. The custom had gained such fame among seamen that French author and naval officer Pierre Loti already knew about it when he came here in 1885. Loti’s vivid descriptions of his one-month sojourn with a young woman named Kane, published in the book *Madame Chrysantheme* in 1893, shocked and fascinated Europe and laid the foundation for an even more famous story on the same

subject: Madame Butterfly.

The School Years

Glover's son was named "Shinzaburo" and remained with his natural mother until the age of about six. Like many other foreigners who fathered children in extramarital relationships with Japanese women, Glover perhaps wanted to give his son a Western-style education and so paid Maki a certain sum of money and persuaded her to give the child up. Glover was now living with a Japanese woman named Tsuru, who had given birth to a daughter named Hana in 1876.

After coming under the care of Thomas and Tsuru, Shinzaburo adopted his stepmother's maiden name Awajiya as a family name and "Tomisaburo" as a given name. From that day onward he was called "Tomi-san" by Japanese people and "Tommy" by foreigners and used the name T.A. (Tomisaburo Awajiya) Glover when speaking or writing in English.

In 1880, American missionary C.S. Long and his wife arrived in Nagasaki and the following year established a Methodist school called Cobleigh Seminary in the Higashiyamate quarter of the European settlement. Tomisaburo was a member of the first class. Four years later he entered Gakushuin (Peers School) in Tokyo, at the time the most exclusive educational institution in Japan. During his four-year stint there, Tomisaburo lodged at the house of Iwasaki Yanosuke, the president of Mitsubishi Co. and close friend of his father.

The school records show that Tomisaburo achieved excellent grades at the beginning of his career at Gakushuin. In fact, he placed first in his class. He later fell behind, however, possibly because of abuse from his classmates over his mixed race and mother's background. This conjecture is supported by the fact that, during his years at Gakushuin, he changed the character for ya in Awajiya from "shop" which suggests plebeian ancestry, to "valley" which strikes a more elegant chord.

Tomisaburo graduated from Gakushuin in March 1888, and on September 1 the same year his name was officially entered in the Japanese family register as the adopted son of Tsuru Glover.

In the autumn of 1890 he entered the University of Pennsylvania as a student in the pre-medical biology course. His reason for choosing the University of Pennsylvania is further evidence of the intimate relationship between the Glover and Iwasaki families: Iwasaki Hisaya (1865-1955), who later succeeded his father as president of Mitsubishi Co., had been studying in the Wharton School of Business at the university since 1887. He graduated in the spring of 1891 with a bachelor of arts degree, the only foreigner in his class. During the less than one year they were together in Philadelphia, Hisaya undoubtedly served as Tomisaburo's mentor and helped him settle into university life.

Tomisaburo returned to Nagasaki in 1893 after two academic years. Although not obtaining a degree, he had had an experience that only a tiny handful of wealthy Japanese could enjoy at that point in history. The stay in Philadelphia had helped him master the English language and European manners, to establish friendships and to gain an international outlook. Moreover, the study of biology was to remain a vital interest throughout his life.

Holme, Ringer & Co.

By 1893 the Nagasaki European settlement had become firmly established. European and American consulates, companies and banks were housed in grand brick and stone buildings along the Bund

(an Anglo-Indian term meaning “waterfront street” and borrowed from the Shanghai vernacular), while foreign-run hotels, restaurants, bars and shops lined the side streets and back quarters. The residential neighborhoods in Higashiyamate and Minamiyamate were now scattered with gracious houses built in the popular quasi-Western colonial style. Flagstone walkways and steps flanked by brick walls extended throughout the settlement, while the old camphor and ginkgo trees cast shade over the rooftops and gardens. The total effect was an atmosphere more of Europe than of Japan.

At No.7, Oura, between the British Consulate and Nagasaki Club, stood the large two-story offices of Holme, Ringer & Co., a trading firm founded in 1868 by British merchants Frederick Ringer and Edward Holme. As soon as he arrived back in Nagasaki Tomisaburo entered the employ of Holme, Ringer & Co. as a junior staff member. From the beginning he showed great ability in liaison work between Japanese and foreigners, his quiet intelligence and warm personality endearing him to both groups.

Soon after moving back into the Glover House he was joined by Thomas, Tsuru and Hana. Thomas had recently retired from the Japan Brewery Co. (predecessor of Kirin Brewery Co.). According to the family register, Tomisaburo’s name was transferred on October 1894 to the register of a certain Kuraba Rihei in the Japanese neighborhood of Ebisu-machi in Nagasaki. The name Kuraba is made up of two characters meaning “warehouse place.” This is feasible as a Japanese surname, but the resemblance to “Glover” is too strong to think that it was anything but a fabrication. Furthermore, only four months earlier Tsuru had changed her registered domicile from Tokyo, not to the Glover House in Minamiyamate, but to the same address in Ebisu-machi. It is likely, therefore, that Thomas and Tsuru invented the name Kuraba and had a new family register created in order to give the twenty-three year old Tomisaburo a solid footing for his new life in Nagasaki.

Subsequently, the young man was in the unique position of being a member of both communities: a Japanese national and registered Nagasaki resident named Kuraba Tomisaburo, and an employee of the British firm Holme, Ringer & Co. and active member of the Nagasaki foreign settlement named T.A. Glover.

In June 1899, Tomisaburo married Nakano Waka, the second daughter of British merchant James Walter and a Japanese woman named Nakano Ei. Walter and Thomas Glover shared an intimate connection with the British firm Jardine, Matheson & Co. and both were active in the business communities in Yokohama and Tokyo.

Tomisaburo and Waka did not have children, but their similar backgrounds and interests made them inseparable lifelong partners.

The International Club

The same year as his marriage, Tomisaburo joined with a number of other prominent Japanese and foreign residents of Nagasaki in the establishment of the “Nagasaki International Club,” an institution designed after the English-style men’s club.

The Nagasaki Club in Oura had served for decades as an exclusive meeting place for foreign residents. The only Japanese people with access to it were special guests or servants. The Nagasaki International Club, on the other hand, was launched as a way to promote interaction between the two communities after the abolition of the foreign settlement in the summer of 1899. The first gathering was held at the restaurant “Seiyotei” on August 1, 1899 and was attended by 125 Japanese,

five Chinese and twenty European and American residents.

After using restaurants and public halls for four years, the club found a permanent home in a new building on Deshima, certainly an appropriate location considering that for centuries Deshima had served as Japan's only window to the Western world and the only meeting place for Japanese and Europeans. Although the project was financed by his employer Frederick Ringer, Tomisaburo was closely involved in all stages of the operation of the club and the construction of the new building.

The first monthly meeting at the new venue was held on the evening of November 10, 1904.

There were present no less than seventy-six members, and the evening passed off as gaily and happily as could be desired. Mayor Yokohama—who is also Chairman of the Club—was in the chair and it would be difficult to find a more genial director of the evening. On his right was Governor Arakawa, and on his left Mr. C.B. Harris, U.S. Consul, while the remaining seventy-three included representative men of all races and callings. There was no stiffness, or undue formality, and an excellent meal progressed smoothly throughout.

Applause signalled the uprising of the Chairman, who in a brief speech outlined the scheme of these monthly dinners, and the conviction of the promoters that they would contribute towards those objects for which the Club was founded. He was followed by Mr. C.B. Harris who announced—to the amusement of all—that he had been called on to interpret the Chairman's speech. He passed from this to the more serious aspect of the moment, and enlarged on the benefits which, he felt certain, would accrue from the continuance of these dinners.

After the consul's address, Tomisaburo spoke to the members on behalf of the founding committee. Although he probably did not mention it, the evening had great personal significance for him because it promised the realization of his highest ideal: the union of the Japanese and foreign communities—the elements of his own ancestry—in a bond of friendship and understanding.

The meetings and dinners of the Nagasaki International Club continued uninterrupted during the following years. The club made a great contribution to the commerce, industry and culture of Nagasaki while bringing together the multinational community of Nagasaki and serving as a welcoming place for visitors from abroad. But the spirit of friendship promoted by Kuraba Tomisaburo was like the flame of a candle burning in a calm protected grotto as dark storm clouds gather on the horizon.

Fish of the Sea

Among the benefits reaped by Japan after its victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) was the right to extend its fishing grounds to the waters around the coast of Korea and the Russian coast of the Japan Sea. Nagasaki and the other ports of Kyushu thus found themselves with a wealth of new marine resources.

In response, Holme, Ringer & Co. established the "Nagasaki Steamship Fishery Co." in October 1907 and appointed Kuraba Tomisaburo as director. In May the following year Tomisaburo imported the first steam trawler—the 179-ton Smokey Joe (renamed Fukaye Maru) built in his father's hometown of Aberdeen, Scotland. Under the supervision of a Captain Ford and two other British experts hired by Tomisaburo, the first trawling experiments were conducted in waters off the Goto Islands. The result was so extraordinary that it provoked an outcry from local fishermen

using traditional fishing methods, but a compromise was reached in June 1909 by the adoption of a number of regulations for steam trawling. Tomisaburo subsequently imported one more trawler from Scotland and had another two built in the Nagasaki Mitsubishi Shipyard.

During the first years the catches were distributed mainly in Nagasaki and surrounding areas, but in February 1912 Tomisaburo arranged for a trial shipment by train to the markets in Osaka. This experiment proved an enormous success and marked the beginning of Nagasaki's role as the foremost fish-producing prefecture in Japan—a position that it holds to this day.

In many ways the year 1908 marked a significant turning point in the modern development of Nagasaki and Japan as a whole. Aside from the epoch-making introduction of steam trawlers, it is noteworthy that the total production of local shipyards exceeded the volume of imported ships for the first time this year. Japan was finally overcoming its dependence on foreign industry and technology. It had proven itself to be a new world power after successive victories in wars with China and Russia and was now glowing with pride, confidence and growing industrial might.

The Glover Fish Atlas

From the time the trawlers brought their first catches into Nagasaki, Kuraba Tomisaburo visited the waterfront frequently to watch the fish being landed. He was of course motivated by business considerations, but there was also a scholarly interest stemming from his years as a biology student. At the University of Pennsylvania he had seen the meticulous watercolor and lithograph illustrations of animal and fish species that filled the biology textbooks. In his first year he had even spent three hours a week himself in a course devoted to freehand drawing from animal models. He was keenly aware that no fish atlas of the scale of those in Europe and America had been produced in Japan. Looking at the great variety of fish hauled up in the trawler nets, Tomisaburo decided to begin systematic research into the fish species living in the ocean near Nagasaki and to compile an authoritative fish atlas.

In 1912 he hired a local artist to do the first illustrations. He had to present examples of the appropriate style and to patiently supervise the initial attempts. A long process of trial and error was probably needed before the Japanese artist—who by training was accustomed to capturing the movement of fishes and birds—grasped the purpose of the project and accepted the unprecedented task of painting a fish in exact detail, right down to the number of scales. The completion of the atlas required a period of twenty-one years, enormous financial expenditures and the painstaking efforts of four successive artists. Entitled *Atlas of Fish Species in the Waters off West and South Japan* and known in Nagasaki as the “Glover Fish Atlas,” the collection of paintings that resulted from these labors is called one of the four great fish atlases of Japan. Preserved today at Nagasaki University Library, it contains a total of 823 minutely detailed watercolor paintings, including 700 illustrations of 558 fish species and 123 illustrations of shell and whale species, all with names in both Latin and local Japanese dialects inscribed carefully in Tomisaburo's handwriting.

The fish atlas was Tomisaburo's life work and his prized possession. Indeed, this herculean work of art and science put Japan on a par with Europe and America in the scientific documentation of fish species and made a significant contribution to this branch of human knowledge.

Social Life in Nagasaki

Kuraba Tomisaburo's involvement in the Nagasaki International Club brought him into regular con-

tact with the leading residents of the city and a steady stream of visitors from other parts of Japan and abroad. During the prosperous early decades of this century, he participated in various organizations and attended the many celebrations and commemorative events held in both the Japanese and foreign communities.

He served as chairman of the Nagasaki Golf Association and played an instrumental role in the foundation of the course at Unzen, Japan's first public golf course. He played halfback in the rugby matches organized by the Nagasaki Football Association in the European settlement, and remained a lifelong supporter of Nagasaki's traditional boat races. He was also one of the leading members of the "Nagasaki Club," a club in Oura dating back to the beginning of the Nagasaki foreign settlement.

Tomisaburo was also an ujiko, or parishioner, of Nagasaki's Suwa Shinto Shrine, an enclave of Japanese culture and tradition on a tree-shaded hillside near the downtown area that has served as a spiritual center for the inhabitants of Nagasaki since its foundation in the year 1634.

In addition to the usual duties associated with parishioner status, Tomisaburo was a member of the Nagasaki Jinkai ("Nagasaki-ites' Club"), a small group of wealthy ujiko. All of the members were leaders of business and politics in Nagasaki, not to mention natives and life-long residents of the city.

For decades Suwa Shrine had been a popular haunt for foreigners seeking the shade of tall trees and the exotic atmosphere of Japan. But no foreign resident had ever, or indeed could ever, become a practicing ujiko. Tomisaburo's role as a parishioner signified not only acceptance as a peer among his fellow Japanese citizens but also his strong commitment to Nagasaki and to the customs and traditions of Japan.

His commitment to the foreign community was equally strong. In May 1936, the British Consulate in Nagasaki sent out invitations to prominent Japanese and foreign residents to attend an afternoon reception on May 12 celebrating the coronation of King George VI. The reception was held at the residence of Fred E.E. Ringer at No. 14 Minamiyamate, the building preserved today in Glover Garden and known as the "Alt House."

Small square tables covered with linen cloths were arranged on the lawn and the guests sat down in groups of four to enjoy a Western-style meal. A photograph taken at the time shows Tomisaburo standing beside one of the tables speaking with the Japanese guests there. He was probably in the middle of a tour around the lawn, extending greetings to his many friends and switching back and forth between English and Japanese as necessary. The photograph offers a candid glimpse into Tomisaburo's personality. It is also one of the last pictures of a peaceful Nagasaki.

Broken Dreams

By 1936 when the luncheon was being held, the Japanese army had already subjugated Manchuria—ignoring the protests of the League of Nations—and was readying itself for all-out war with China that would begin the following year. Already, the news from the mainland was causing ripples of concern in the once serene Chinese and European communities in Nagasaki.

The incident at Luguoqiao (Marco Polo Bridge) near Beijing on July 7, 1937 triggered the outbreak of war between Japan and China and opened the floodgates for Japanese military movements on the

continent. Before the end of the year, Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and the national capital at Nanjing had fallen under the force of the attacking armies. Britain and the United States were not involved directly in the fighting, but the Japanese made no effort to hide their defiance of the Western powers. In isolated incidents in the autumn of 1937, the British ambassador to China was killed when his train traveling between Nanjing and Shanghai was machine-gunned by Japanese aircraft, and the American gunboat U.S.S. Panay was bombed and sunk in the Yangtse River.

In Nagasaki, meanwhile, the parishioners of Suwa Shrine convened a general meeting about one month after the outbreak of war and joined in a Shinto ritual to pray for victory. There is no record as to whether Kuraba Tomisaburo attended this ritual, but there can be no doubt that the ominous changes in the world situation had already begun to cause him anguish and worry.

Everything in Nagasaki suddenly began to prepare itself for war. Arms factories appeared in the city and existing workshops were revamped for the manufacture of war-related products. Young men were conscripted in increasing numbers and the railroad stations thundered with cheers of *banzai* as they departed to join their regiments. When ships left the harbor carrying soldiers to China, hundreds of children were brought by their schools to stand on the waterfront and wave flags. Citizens were compelled to join various patriotic rallies, exercises and work crews. The spirit of war was only enhanced by the successive victories of the Japanese army in China and the government's assurances that the fighting was necessary to liberate people from the oppression of imperialism and to achieve a "Sphere of Co-Prosperity in Greater East Asia."

The Nagasaki Mitsubishi Shipyard also began to concentrate on the production of warships. In 1938, the construction of one of the world's largest and most formidable battleships—the *Musashi*—began in Dock No. 2 at the shipyard under commission from the Japanese navy. The dock had been equipped with a huge gantry crane in March 1936, making it the largest in the Orient.

The project proceeded under strict secrecy. In order to prevent outsiders—both Japanese and foreign—from viewing the work, rope curtains were hung from tall wooden frames around the dock, and uniformed guards stood watch along the streets nearby. Even passengers on ships to outlying islands were ordered to stay inside and to draw black curtains across the windows when leaving and entering Nagasaki Harbor.

The construction of the *Musashi* brought a wrenching upheaval in the lives of Kuraba Tomisaburo and his wife Waka. On June 30, 1939, they sold Glover House to Mitsubishi and moved into the house at No.9, Minamiyamate at the bottom of the hill. The new house was a fine two-story Western-style structure with a long entrance and spacious gardens with an enormous centuries-old camphor tree, but it certainly had none of the personal or historical significance of Glover House.

Most Japanese records claim that for some unstated reason Tomisaburo came forward and asked Mitsubishi to buy the house, to which request the company agreed. It seems obvious, however, that Tomisaburo's presence in the house—which commanded an excellent view of the shipyard where the *Musashi* was taking shape—was altogether unacceptable to the military authorities supervising the project, and that they forced Mitsubishi to persuade Tomisaburo to sell the house and move out. His many close friends at the company were undoubtedly grieved to see this happen, but their sentiments had no sway over the decisions of the military. Willing or not, Nagasaki had become an important cog in the expanding Japanese war machine. The naval authorities dispatched to Nagasaki from other parts of the country had no knowledge of or interest in Tomisaburo's con-

tributions to the city's economy and culture in peace time, let alone any nostalgia about Thomas Glover's role in the establishment of the modern Japanese navy. In their eyes Tomisaburo was nothing more than a potential spy.

The atmosphere of peace and international understanding that had always enveloped Nagasaki dissipated quickly during the following months. The foreign enterprises that had not already folded were forced to close down after Japan formed an alliance with Germany and Italy and the German armed forces invaded Poland in September 1940. The foreign employees hastily gathered their belongings and left Nagasaki behind, watching from the steamer decks as the familiar hillsides faded from sight.

Among the firms that closed down that year was Holme, Ringer & Co., which had operated in Nagasaki without interruption since 1868. Fred E.E. Ringer, the eldest son of founder Frederick Ringer, died in his residence at the age of fifty-six. His illness had no doubt been compounded by the stress of seeing the company close and his life-long connections with Nagasaki suddenly dissolve. Fred's younger brother Sydney managed to leave the country in October, but his two sons Vanya and Michael were arrested on suspicion of spying. They later escaped overseas and joined the British army in India. Like many other former Nagasaki residents, Sydney Ringer and his wife waited in Shanghai hoping that the hostilities would come to a quick conclusion, but they were later arrested by the Japanese army and spent the rest of the war in Chinese concentration camps.

As in other Japanese cities, severe privations were imposed on the citizens of Nagasaki from around the beginning of 1940. There was a growing shortage of rice, barley and other staple foods, and luxury items such as charcoal and sugar became virtually impossible to obtain. Kuraba Waka described these increasing hardships in a letter to a nephew in Tokyo:

The lack of various products is becoming very distressing. For several days now there has been no charcoal available in Nagasaki, although huge loads of it can be seen piled on ships and trains coming into the city. All of the charcoal has been purchased by the ministry of agriculture and forestry and not a single bag can be obtained by anyone else. Next month they say that they will start rationing it, but I hear that the rations will be far from sufficient. Eggs have also completely disappeared from Nagasaki. I haven't tasted one in more than two months... I wonder where all the eggs in Nagasaki Prefecture could have gone. Potatoes can no longer be seen in the markets either. Everything has become so difficult. But I know that we have no choice but to endure the hardships and to accept all this as part of government policy.

The situation continued to deteriorate. Tomisaburo and Waka tried to carry on with their social life as before, but they found themselves increasingly hampered by the kempeitai military police who were now exercising considerable control over daily affairs in the city. Everyone was subject to the bullying presence of these military police, but the homes of Tomisaburo and other residents of mixed ancestry were kept under special surveillance to prevent any "unpatriotic" activities. When Tomisaburo or Waka left the house and went into the city, the police followed them and took careful note of the people to whom they spoke. These people were later interrogated about the content of the conversations.

Then, on December 8 (Japan time), 1941, Japan declared war on Britain, the United States and Holland and launched a surprise attack against the American fleet at Pearl Harbor the same day. Until now only a looming threat, Japan plunged into war with the Allied countries and its armed

forces began their drive to take over Hong Kong, Singapore and other areas of East Asia under European domination.

The attack on Pearl Harbor marked the final collapse of the bridge of goodwill that had been the very foundation of Tomisaburo's life in Nagasaki. The timing of the attack added a painfully ironic touch: it occurred on his seventy- first birthday.

Despair and Tragedy

As war raged in the Pacific, Tomisaburo and Waka retreated into a life of solitude. The military police became relentless in their surveillance, resorting to tactics like posing as electricians or plumbers in order to gain entrance into the Kuraba home. Tomisaburo's many old friends now avoided contact with him because of the harassments they would have to endure if they acknowledged even a simple greeting. The gardener and other people with whom he had daily contact were also subjected to persistent investigations.

On May 4, 1943, Waka died at the age of sixty-eight in the house at No. 9, Minamiyamate. The loss of his partner of more than four decades and the one person who intimately shared and understood his deepest feelings was a crushing blow to Tomisaburo. After that he fared as best he could, spending his time tinkering in the garden, caring for his dogs and reading about the war in the newspapers. He now rarely left the Minamiyamate property, and his simple needs were attended to by a faithful housekeeper.

Near the end of the war, air-raid sirens began to sound with increasing frequency, but for the most part Nagasaki was spared the blanket bombings devastating other cities. An air-raid alarm was sounded early in the morning of August 9, 1945 but was lifted around 8:30 a.m. People emerged from the shelters and went back to their daily routines. Tomisaburo was at home as usual when the hands of his watch crept past eleven o'clock.

Suddenly a brilliant flash of light filled the sky, followed within seconds by a thunderous explosion and ferocious blast of wind. The American B-29 that had dropped the second atomic bomb on Japan slanted high over Nagasaki Harbor and disappeared into the southern sky.

Although the house at No.19 Minamiyamate was located more than five kilometers from the hypocenter, the windows were smashed in by the blast and the ceramic roof tiles flew off like flecks of dirt. As Tomisaburo reeled in shock, a mushroom cloud churned up into the hot summer sky over the northern part of Nagasaki.

Six days later on August 15, the emperor made his historic announcement of surrender over the radio and the cruelest war in human history came to a close.

The entire northern section of Nagasaki was a barren smoking wasteland, and much of the rest of the city had been severely damaged by the blast and subsequent fires. Thousands of corpses still lay strewn among the rubble, and the valley and mountainsides facing the hypocenter were scorched reddish-brown and stripped of all life.

On the morning of August 26, when rumors about the impending Allied occupation were darting around Nagasaki, Kuraba Tomisaburo was found dead in one of the disarranged rooms of his house. He had strangled his dogs and then hung himself with a length of clothes line, dying hunched forward, feet on the floor and eyes locked open in an eternal stare.

Higher up the hillside, the Glover House stood ravaged and desolate, its broken windows looking out onto the devastated city like eye holes in a skull. A breathless hush hung over the neighborhoods of the foreign settlement, and the once bustling harbor was now drained permanently of activity and international color.

Tomisaburo's self-inflicted death—just when the end of fighting should have meant profound relief—is a mystery that may never be solved. Did he, like so many other Japanese immediately after the war, succumb to the backlash of years of hardships that turned out to be futile? Did this, along with the fact that he was seventy-five years old, utterly alone and deeply grieved by the destruction of his hometown, push him over the brink of despair?

Undoubtedly yes. But for Tomisaburo the impending Allied occupation was perhaps the final catalyst. For six years he had patiently endured the unfounded suspicions of his Japanese countrymen. Now he faced the prospect of accusations by the British and Americans or, even worse, pressure to do what for Tomisaburo was the impossible: to take sides.

Sydney Ringer did not return to Japan until after the departure of the occupation forces in 1952. His main purpose was to retrieve the various assets that had been frozen by the Japanese government and to begin the process of selling off his property in Nagasaki. While here he lived in his former home on the Minamiyamate hillside. People who were guests at the house during that short period say that he often became distracted in the middle of conversations and muttered “poor Tommy,” shaking his head and gazing out over the harbor into the distance.

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