

FOR THIS COUNTRY

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More than half a century ago, thousands of university students crowded together at the Jingu stadium. Now, was there a baseball game between Keio and Waseda? No. Japan at the midst of World War 2 and at the Jingu stadium held a ceremony for the departure of students for the front. The people I would like through war and the university students 56 years ago who actually lived through war and the university students 56 years later who only knows the word, "war." With poor knowledge about the true aspects, there is a risk of repeating the same mistake.

In those days boys were required to take physical examinations for conscription when they reached the age of 20. It was their duty to serve 2 years in the army and also responding when called up for service even after being discharged. Therefore during wartime or not, grown-up men were always targets of military draft. However university~ students were able to receive a temporary exemption till the age of 25 if they wrote a postponement note. But finally in September of 1943, 2 years after World War 2 started, orders were given to ban the temporary exemption. 1 million 300 thousand is the estimated number of college students sent to the battlefields that year. Among the students carrying guns on their shoulders in front of Prime Minister Hideki Tojo at Jingu stadium was my grandfather. And among the girl students in the audience seats seeing these men off was my grandmother which they later found out after getting married.

Since I was curious about the sentiment of these students having to face this senseless act of violence at my age, I interviewed my grandparents. Grandpa's way of reciting was as if he had been transported through time to the era when he was a student. He spoke very fluently like reading a book to me.

"I was one of the lucky ones ordered to stay in the mainland. The rest were dispatched to places like Manshu, China, and the Philippines armed with M38s, the same guns we used in the Russo-Japanese war while they had automatic rifles and machine guns. Everyday newspapers were more than you do now Genki. We were calmly watching the trend of the world when the public was in the mood to

fight for the country. None of us went for this country, but we went for our family. I personally don't think of myself as a victim of war because I am here, alive, talking to my grandson."

While my grandfather was speaking, grandma sitting next to him was starting far away. It seemed like she was recalling her past when words finally came out of her mouth. "I had a brother." As she said this she leaned forward, widened her eyes and took a deep breath. I immediately understood that her brother had died in war. From her story I later found out that he and his squad died of hunger in the mountains of Philippines while fleeing from enemy troops. She also told me her episodes about the air-raid and bombings which turned Tokyo into an area swept by flames. She went to bed wearing her clothes and shoes for immediate evacuation. Everyone was fighting. Soldiers, women and children. Each in a different way but everyone lived standing face to face with war.

Our elder generation lived with all their might wishing for a modest happiness. They are the ones who transformed the ruins of fire into an economic giant. They prepared the grounds sweating blood and working their fingers to the bone. We must considerate the fact that we are let to live on what they built up. Pass down the truth with great care. This I believe is the precious significance of learning the history called "war."

We have much more to learn from our seniors.

For those 98 students of Keio University who helped organize today's Fukuzawa trophy, if you have the chance please visit the cenotaph built in memory of war victims located behind the old library of Mita campus. Confront and contemplate on the spirits of those resting in peace.

And a step everyone can take after this speech contest is to interview or even have a chat with your grandparents and relatives of that generation. The speaker once being the age of the young fellow taking notes in front when he or she had experienced war. The listener can imagine the old fellow speaking in front actually lived through the world of bloody massacre at the same age. When a sense of unity is born, the former knowing that he will be departing from this world in a short time will try to tell everything as one's heart and mind at strength. Transcending the 50 few years of space-time, the war-memories will be passed down to the next generation.

Lastly when hearing the word "war," don't immediately think big like "the government" or "international relations" but start by thinking that people of your age were dragged into it.

Students watching Clark Gable in "It Happened One Night," listening to jazz were suddenly ordered to go to war for the sake of this country. Their appointed task was to cut the Gordian knot, bring back victory and peace. Once they were handed the 1 way ticket they searched for the true meaning of life unable to bear the fear of a meaningless death.

We must pass on the legacy our former generation have left and are leaving us. It is our responsibility to inherit their experience of war. And it is our duty to create a world where no student has to go to the front leaving the only words he can say, "I will go, for this country."

We are here because they were there.