



Katsumi Kasahar

## Two Times Lucky

*What happens twice will  
happen three times.*

Japanese saying

**H**E WAS CALLED BY SOME ‘THE luckiest man in history,’ but no appellation was ever more steeped in irony.

At 7:30 on the morning of August 6, 1945, Tsutomu Yamaguchi—an employee of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries—was just preparing for his journey home when sirens blared out throughout the city of Hiroshima.

Yamaguchi had spent three months in the strategic port city working on a design for a new oil tanker, and the 29-year old engineer was accustomed to the sound of sirens.

But rather than signalling an air raid, this morning’s alert was a welcome ‘all clear’ message, letting the city’s 350,000 inhabitants know that it was safe to go aside and enjoy the clear, summer weather.

At that same moment, two miles over the island of Iwo Jima, an ordnance expert was crouching in the bomb bay of the B-29 bomber *Enola Gay*, arming the single most powerful weapon man had ever devised.

45 minutes later, Yamaguchi was walking to Mitsubishi’s shipyard a final time to pick up some documents he had left there when he heard the drone of an aircraft overhead. Looking up, he saw an American plane drop an object attached to two small parachutes.

Seconds later the sky lit up, as Yamaguchi later described it, with “the lightning of a huge magnesium flare.” He barely had time to dive into a nearby ditch before the shock wave from the bomb—exploding with a force of 13,000 tons of TNT—picked him up off the ground, spun him in the air like a rag doll, and dumped him unceremoniously in a nearby potato patch.

Yamaguchi wouldn't find out until later how fortunate he was to survive the blast, as he had been standing a scant two miles from Ground Zero. The explosion of 'Little Boy' —the first atomic bomb used in warfare— killed or fatally wounded 140,000 people, about 40% of the city's population.

Upon regaining consciousness—and despite having radiation burns across much of his body—Yamaguchi stumbled through the dust and debris to meet two coworkers he had been separated from at the shipyard. The three made their way to a crowded shelter, where they spent a restless night.

The following morning, they made their way through piles of incinerated bodies to the train station, which had somehow survived the explosion. Yamaguchi travelled past shattered buildings and corpses lining the streets, before arriving by train the next morning at his home 180 miles away.

Returning to his house after a brief stop at the hospital, he was reunited with his wife, Hisako, and their infant son, Katsutoshi. Two days later, on the 9th of August, with his burns swatched in bandages, he dutifully reported to work at Mitsubishi's local office.

At precisely 11:02 he was relating his experience in Hiroshima to his incredulous boss and co-workers (who could scarcely comprehend how a single bomb could destroy an entire city) when he saw another flash of light in the sky and felt a shock wave throwing him to the ground.

Another plane had dropped a second atom bomb nicknamed 'Fat Man,' which exploded above the city of Nagasaki with the force of 25,000 tons of TNT, killing 74,000 people.

Yet, once again Yamaguchi miraculously survived. Rushing home, he found that after seeking refuge in a tunnel, his wife and son had also suffered only minor injuries.

Over the following days, Yamaguchi's double dose of radiation took its toll: His hair fell out, the burns on his arms turned gangrenous, and he vomited incessantly. Despite having opposed ever going to war, when Japan surrendered on August 11, he was "neither sorry nor glad," still too much in shock to have any feelings about it.

Like many of the roughly 250,000 survivors of the two atomic explosions, Yamaguchi continued to suffer physically from his ordeal, his skin wrapped in bandages for the following twelve years. His wife and children were also plagued by health problems throughout their lives, with his son dying of in 2005 at age 59 and his wife in 2008, both of cancer.

But apart from his and his family's health issues, Yamaguchi's life gradually returned to normal. He received financial and medical aid as a *hibakusha*, or *atomic bomb survivor* (although he initially reported only being present at Hiroshima).

It wasn't until after the death of his son that Yamaguchi began to feel that he had an obligation to begin speaking out against nuclear weapons. He agreed to take part in a documentary and spoke frequently abroad. Decrying the continued threat of nuclear warfare before the UN, he asked, "How can they keep developing these weapons?"

In 2009, only a year after his recognition as a *nijyuu hibakusha*, or *twice-bombed person*, Tsutomu 'Lucky' Yamaguchi died from stomach cancer at the age of 93. At his funeral, the mayor of Nagasaki mourned the loss of "a precious storyteller."

Yamaguchi often said, "As a double atomic bomb survivor I experienced the bomb twice, and I sincerely hope there will not be a third."

We can all only hope that the world will be so lucky. ■