66th HIROSHIMA-NAGASAKI (KOBE, JAPAN, AIR WAR) REMEMBRANCE,
SATURDAY AUGUST 6, 2011

Compiled by Dick Bennett

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This Remembrance is OMNI’s oldest action (beginning in its first incarnation as the Peace Organizing Committee during the Vietnam War). Because nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were so brutally and indiscriminately aimed at civilians, and because they began the nuclear arms race, the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has particularly represented to the world the cruelty and madness of war and U.S. violence. But today we wish to Remember all the victims of air war, the 800,000 Japanese and German civilians killed by US and (in Germany) British bombs. The firebombing of Hamburg in 1943 killed 45,000 noncombatants. More people were killed in the great firestorm bombings of Tokyo than were killed in Hiroshima.
The destruction of these cities is symptomatic of something larger—of the immeasurable violence unleashed in the 20th century, of the removal of all restraints over war during the century of mass killing, of the lack of moral and practical foresight by our leaders.

Kobe, Japan, was one of the city victims. On March 17, 1945, 331 American B-29 bombers launched a firebombing attack against the city of Kobe, Japan. Of the city's residents, 8,841 were confirmed to have been killed in the resulting firestorms, which destroyed an area of three square miles and included 21% of Kobe's urban area. At the time, the city covered an area of 14 square miles (36 km²). More raids followed. Eventually, more than 650,000 people had their homes destroyed, and the homes of another million people were damaged.

To read more about air war, Hiroshima-Nagasaki, and related subjects, go to OMNI’s web site newsletters http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

and to Dick’s Blog, “It’s the War Department.”:

http://jamesricharbennett.blogspot.com/

AIR WAR AGAINST KOBE, JAPAN WORLD WAR II: GRAVE OF FIREFLIES
of the Fireflies (1988)

BY ROGER EBERT / March 19, 2000

The waning days of World War II, American bombers drop napalm cansisters on Japanese cities, creating fire storms. These bombs, longer than a tin can and as big around, fall to earth trailing cloth tails that flutter behind them; almost a beautiful sight. After they hit, there is a moment's silence, and they detonate, spraying their surroundings with flames. In a Japanese
residential neighborhood, made of flimsy wood and paper houses, there is no way to fight the fires.

"Grave of the Fireflies" (1988) is an animated film telling the story of two children from the port city of Kobe, made homeless by the bombs. Seita is a young teenager, and his sister Setsuko is about 5. Their father is in the Japanese navy, and their mother is a bomb victim; Seita kneels beside her body, covered with burns, in an emergency hospital. Their home, neighbors, schools are all gone. For a time an aunt takes them in, but she's cruel about the need to feed them, and eventually Seita finds a hillside cave where they can live. They have no food to buy, and to answer Setsuko's questions about their parents. The first shot of the film shows Seita dead in a subway station, and so we can guess Setsuko's fate; we are accompanied through flashbacks by the boy's spirit.

"Grave of the Fireflies" is an emotional experience so powerful that it forces a rethinking of animation. Since the earliest days, most animated films have been "cartoons" for children and families. Recent animated films like "The Lion King," "Princess Mononoke" and "The Iron Giant" have touched on more serious themes, and the "Toy Story" movies and classics like "Bambi" have had moments that moved some audiences to tears. But these films exist within safe confines; they inspire tears, but not grief. "Grave of the Fireflies" is a powerful dramatic film that happens to be animated, and I know what the critic Ernest Rister means when he compares it to "Schindler's List" and says, "It is the most profoundly human animated film I've seen."

It tells a simple story of survival. The boy and his sister must find a place to stay, and food to eat. In wartime their relatives are not kind or generous, and after their aunt sells their mother's kimonos for rice, she keeps a lot of the rice for herself. Eventually, Seita realizes it is time to leave. He has some money and can buy food---there is no food to buy. His sister grows weaker. Their story is told not as melodrama, but simply, in the neorealist tradition. And there is time for silence in it. One of the film's greatest gifts is its shots are held so we can think about them, characters are glimpsed in private moments, atmosphere is given time to establish themselves.

like Japanese poets use "pillow words" that are halfway between pauses and punctuation, and the great director Ozu uses "pillow shots"---a detail from nature, say, to separate two scenes. "Grave of the Fireflies" m, too. Its visuals create a kind of poetry. There are moments of quick action, as when the bombs rain down and terrified people fill the streets, but this film doesn't exploit action; it meditates on its consequences.

was directed by Isao Takahata, who is associated with the famous Ghibli Studio, source of the Japanese animation. His colleague there is Hayao Miyazaki ("Princess Mononoke," "Kiki's Delivery Service," "My Neighbor Totoro"). His films are not usually this serious, but "Grave of the Fireflies" is in a category by itself. It's based on a semi-autobiographical novel by Nosaka Akiyuki--who was a boy at the time of the firebombs, whose sister did die of hunger and whose life has been shadowed by guilt.

It is well-known in Japan, and might easily have inspired a live-action film. It isn't the typical material of animation. But for "Grave of the Fireflies," I think animation was the right choice. Live action would have been burdened by the weight of special effects, violence and action. Animation allows Takahata to concentrate on the story, and the lack of visual realism in his animated characters allows our imagination more room from the literal fact of real actors, we can more easily merge the characters with our own imagination.

Hollywood animation has been pursuing the ideal of "realistic animation" for decades, even though that's an oxymoron. People who are drawn do not look like people who are photographed. They're more stylized, more.
obviously symbolic, and (as Disney discovered in painstaking experiments) their movements can be adapted to communicate mood through body language. "Grave of the Fireflies" doesn't attempt even the realism of "The Lion King" or "Princess Mononoke," but paradoxically it is the most realistic animated film I've ever seen—in feeling.

The locations and backgrounds are drawn in a style owing something to the 18th century Japanese artist and his modern disciple Herge (the creator of Tin Tin). There is great beauty in them—not cartoon but evocative landscape drawing, put through the filter of animated style. The characters are typical of modern Japanese animation, with their enormous eyes, childlike bodies and features of great plasticity (mouths are tiny when closed, but enormous when opened in a child's cry—we even see Setsuko's tonsils). This proves, if it needs proving, that animation produces emotional effects not by reproducing reality, but by heightening and simplifying it, so that many of the sequences are about ideas, not experiences.

There are individual moments of great beauty. One involves a night when the children catch fireflies and use them to illuminate their cave. The next day, Seita finds his little sister carefully burying the dead insects—as she imagines her mother was buried. There is another sequence in which the girl prepares "dinner" for her brother by using mud to make "rice balls" and other imaginary delicacies. And note the timing and the use of silence in a sequence where they find a dead body on the beach, and then more bombers appear far away in the sky.

Rister singles out another shot: "There's a moment where the boy Seita traps an air bubble with a wash rag, submerges it, and then releases it into his sister Setsuko's delighted face—and that's when I knew I was watching something special."

The ancient Japanese cultural currents flowing beneath the surface of "Grave of the Fireflies," and explained by critic Dennis H. Fukushima Jr., who finds the story's origins in the tradition of double-plays. It is not that Seita and Setsuko commit suicide overtly, but that life wears away their will to live. He draws a parallel between their sheltering cave and hillside tombs.

Fukushima cites an interview with the author, Akiyuki: "Having been the sole survivor, he felt guilty for the death of his sister. While scavenging for food, he had often fed himself first, and his sister second. Her sole cause of death was hunger, and it was a sad fact that would haunt Nosaka for years. It prompted him to write about the experience, in hopes of purging the demons tormenting him."

Because it is animated and from Japan, "Grave of the Fireflies" has been little seen. When anime fans say it is a cartoon, and the kids have eyes like saucers, but it belongs on any list of the greatest war films ever made.
Nuclear weapons testing has been conducted worldwide on lands taken from indigenous people. In the case of the Nevada National Security Site (formerly the “Nevada Test Site”), the land legally belongs to the Western Shoshone Nation by the Treaty of Ruby Valley (1863). Nuclear weapons despoil delicate ecosystems held sacred by those with the least political power, and declared expendable by those with the most. More than a thousand atomic weapons have been detonated at the NNSS making it the most bombed place on the planet.

We come to the desert to engage the destruction of violence with the constructive nonviolence. We seek reconnection with each other and the earth, by understanding and taking responsibility for the consequences of our actions.

Since the birth of NDE in 1982, thousands of people have come to our retreats and conferences to learn about the related issues of nuclear testing and gathered at the edge of Security Site for vigil, religious services, and nonviolent civil disobedience. NDE’s organizing seeks to honor all of God’s creation and the Beloved Community as we bear witness to sixty years of nuclear destruction.

While the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Non-proliferation Treaty have been resounding victories for our movement toward nuclear abolition, the United States is currently spending more American tax dollars on the nuclear weapons’ program than at any point during the Cold War. The Department of Energy has admitted the legacy of nuclear testing has left four tons of plutonium (the single most carcinogenic substance known to humans) in the desert soil. Now the government seeks to expand the repository capacity at the Test Site for highly radioactive materials. When we consider that all of this devastating reality resides up the road from Las Vegas, the fastest growing city in the nation, our call to action is deeply clarified.
Bombing of Kobe in World War II

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On March 17, 1945, 331 American B-29 bombers launched a firebombing attack against the city of Kobe, Japan. Of the city's residents, 8,841 were confirmed to have been killed in the resulting firestorms, which destroyed an area of three square miles and included 21% of Kobe's urban area. At the time, the city covered an area of 14 square miles (36 km²). More than 650,000 people had their homes destroyed, and the homes of another million people were damaged.\(^{[citation needed]}\)

After the bombing of Kobe

On June 5 that same year, Kobe was bombed again. Incendiaries dropped from 473 bombers destroyed 4.4 square miles (11 km²) of the city.\(^{[citation needed]}\)

In addition to incendiary attacks, Kobe was the target of a B-29 precision attack on industry, three mine-laying operations and one fighter-bomber sweep.\(^{[1]}\)

- May 11, 1945: 92 B-29s hit Kawanishi aircraft industry
June 18, 1945: 25 B-29s laid naval mines in several areas including waters near Kobe
June 28, 1945: 29 B-29s laid naval mines in three harbors including Kobe
July 19, 1945: 27 B-29s laid naval mines in several areas including waters near Kobe
July 30, 1945: Fighters attack airfields, railroads and tactical targets throughout Kobe-
Osaka area

[edit] See also
Extent of destroyed areas of Kobe as surveyed in 1946

- Pacific War
- Pacific Theater of Operations
- Bombing of Tokyo in World War II
- Grave of the Fireflies (novel), a novel set during the bombing.
  - Grave of the Fireflies, an anime film based on the novel.

[edit] Further reading


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