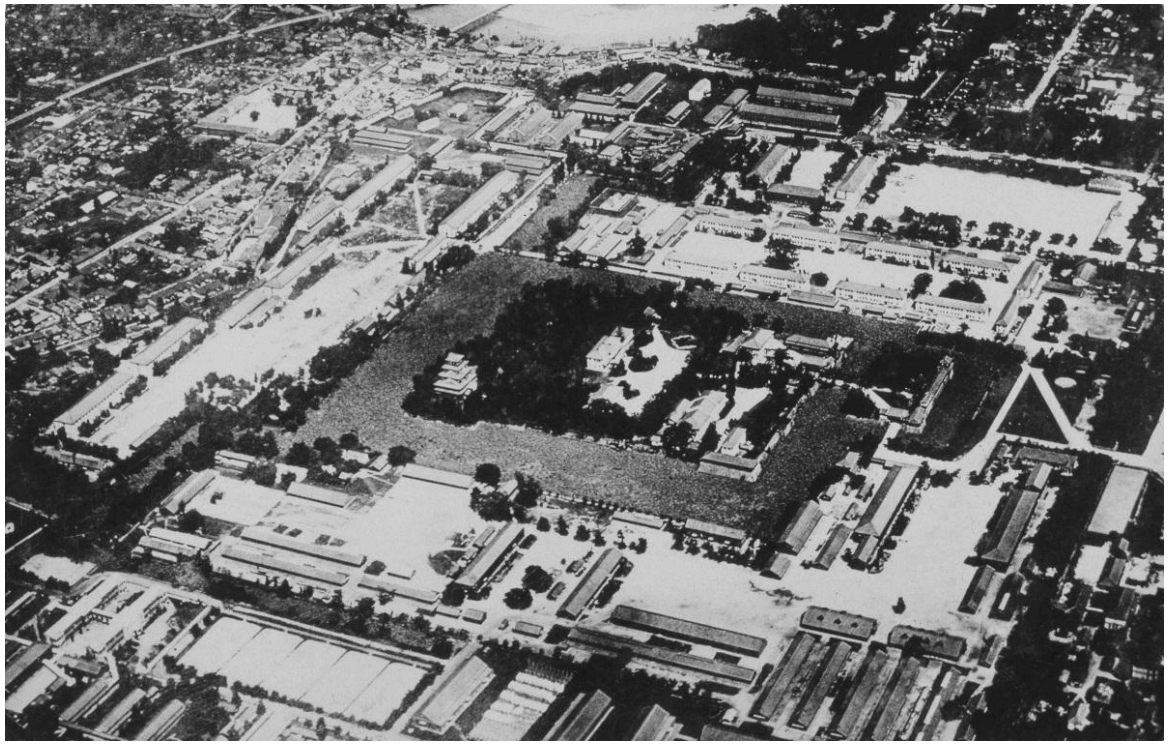
Chapter 3　Wartime Hiroshima

3-01 Soldiers of the Fifth Division and citizens seeing them off. Photographed from the head office building of Hiroshima Denki (now Chugoku Electric Power Company's head office)
(April 1936)

Wartime Hiroshima

The First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War spurred the establishment and expansion of military facilities in Hiroshima. The headquarters of the Army's Fifth Division was located in Hiroshima Castle, and major military facilities were concentrated around Hiroshima Castle, Hiroshima Station, and Ujina. At the end of the Pacific War, the military facilities occupied about 10% of the total city area.



3-02 Hiroshima Castle and the surrounding area, where military facilities were concentrated (1927)

Before the atomic bombing, there were many facilities at Hiroshima Castle. The castle tower, the former Imperial Headquarters building, and the former residence of Empress Shoken, which were designated as Historic Sites, as well as the Chugoku Military District Headquarters were within the main enclosure. Outside the inner moat were the Hiroshima District Headquarters, the First Infantry Replacement Unit, and the Artillery Replacement Unit. Surrounding these were the West Drill Ground, the Chugoku Military Police Headquarters, and other facilities.

3-03 Fifth Division Headquarters building, which was later used by the Chugoku Military District Headquarters (c. 1926)

In September 1931, Japan's Kanto-gun (Kwantung Army) set off an explosion on the railway line at Liutiao in Northeast China. This was the beginning of the Manchurian Incident (Mukden Incident).

The Fifth Division, based in Hiroshima, and mobilized troops from across the nation departed from Ujina Port. In the city, neighborhood associations, schools, and other groups gathered to see off the soldiers sent to the battlefields.

3-04 Soldiers marching to Ujina Port (1932)

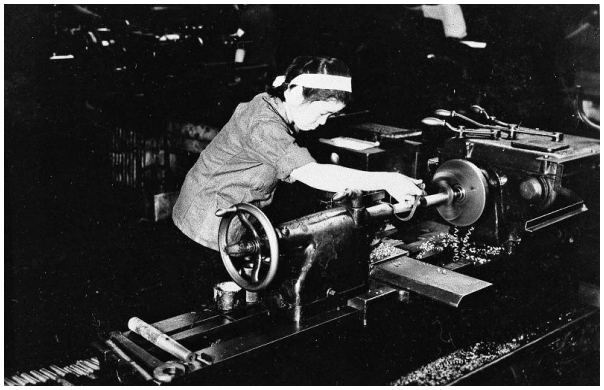
In 1937, when the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out, as a military city, Hiroshima experienced an economic boom, centered around munitions factories. However, as the war situation deteriorated, there were severe material shortages. In July 1940, the national government prohibited the production, manufacture, and sale of non-essential, non-urgent, and luxury goods listed by the government. In the City of Hiroshima, a rationing system using coupons began for sugar and matches in November, and rice rationing using ration books began in December.

3-05 "Contribute copper and iron, and break the enemy's siege"
Poster calling for cooperation in metal collection

On December 7, 1941 (December 8 Japan time), the Japanese military attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and the war rapidly spread across Asia and the Pacific. In February 1942, rationing coupons were introduced in Hiroshima for clothing, miso, and soy sauce. In May of that year, collection of metal such as iron and copper began in order to secure resources to be used for armaments. What with the rationing systems and other restrictions, citizens were forced to endure austere lives.

3-06 Mobilized students doing maintenance of anti-aircraft guns at the Hiroshima Army Ordnance Supply Depot (Early 1940s)

In April 1938, the National Mobilization Law was promulgated, and conscription of civilians to work in vital industries started. As the war progressed, workers were drafted and sent to battlefields. In order to supplement the labor shortage, students and women were also mobilized to military facilities and munition factories.



3-07 A mobilized fourth-year student from Hiroshima Girls' Commercial School, operating a lathe at Toyo Kogyo (July 1944)

During the war, many Koreans were forcibly mobilized from the Korean Peninsula. Many were brought to the City of Hiroshima and neighboring areas to work at the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Hiroshima Shipyard and Toyo Kogyo. People who were forcibly brought to Hiroshima from mainland China were mostly sent to work at a power plant outside the city.

3-08 Group of men conscripted from the Korean Peninsula to work at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Hiroshima Shipyard (October 1944, at Hiroshima Gokoku Shrine)

Farmers were also drafted and sent to war. Food production drastically declined because of shortages of farmhands, fertilizers and other materials. By the end of the war, food shortages became even more severe. In order to increase food production, vegetables were grown on schoolyards, and children tilled the ground.

3-09 Children tilling the schoolyard at Noboricho Elementary School (1944)

The urban area of Hiroshima had escaped large-scale attacks even after U.S. air raids on the mainland intensified. However, as the war dragged on, the evacuation of schoolchildren in the city from the third grade through sixth grade began in April 1945. The evacuated children endured loneliness and hunger for many days, living away from their parents and siblings at temples and other places in the northern part of the prefecture or in the suburbs. Many of them lost their families in the atomic bombing and were orphaned.

3-10 Children from Noboricho Elementary School, having a meal with their parents visiting them at the temple which was their evacuation site (1945)

In the city, fire drills such as bucket relays were conducted to prepare for air raids, along with the demolition of houses to create firebreaks.

3-11 Bucket relay at a fire drill in Takanobashi (1944)

Building demolition began in the city area of Hiroshima with the national government notice issued in November 1944 and was conducted at full scale the following year. Houses were dismantled by members of neighborhood associations in the city, workplaces, and the national volunteer corps from neighboring towns and villages. Student corps from secondary schools and higher elementary schools cleaned up the debris. In August 1945, approximately 30,000 members of national volunteer corps and 15,000 members of the student corps were ordered to work daily outdoors, with no shelter.

3-12 A drawing by a citizen on the theme of the atomic bombing, depicting the building demolition work in Takeya-cho
Houses were dismantled by sawing through the pillars, tying ropes around the beams, and pulling them down.