

Military service record

Shigeru Yamamoto (Horigome, 94 years old)

I am from Hyogo prefecture, and took the conscription exam and passed it in April 1942. I joined the Himeji 46 unit in November 1943. After going through rugged military training for recruits, we dispatched troops to the Philippines from Himeji.

In the field, we lacked weapons, so I was given a rifle that was snatched from the enemies. I arrived at Davao City, Mindanao Island as a military guard of a 100th division (Aka. Corp) headquarters. Then I was transferred to the military accountant's department.

In April 1945, U.S. forces landed in the Philippines at last. We couldn't do anything but retreat because of their attacks using modern weapons. We went deep into Apo Mountain, which is the biggest mountain in Davao, and followed HQ amongst a jungle without any sunlight for our lives. For lack of subsistence, there were a bunch of debilitated soldiers lying on the ground on our way. But there was nothing I could do about it.

The small valley land called Basho was the last place for HQ. Even U.S. forces gave up on chasing us to the place. Eventually, we ran out of subsistence and ate everything free from poison like leaf buds. We were ordered to put salts inside of a bamboo tube on our knapsacks. Salts kept me from hunger just a little, I came to know the importance of salts by that. Soldiers in the general unit reported that they died in battles, but actually lots of them starved to death.

Each of us left Basho for food in the middle of July. When we reached the cluster of indigenous people, we asked for a place to sleep and food for a night. We gave them a spoonful of salt to show our appreciation. That made them so happy because salts are valuable deep in the mountain. We lived with the original inhabitants of a cluster for we could not go any further in the mountain. In September, we were informed that Japan has lost the war and ordered to go down the mountain. The indigenous people gave us food for 10 days for a returned journey and they walked us back halfway home. We went down the road that we had gone up before. Debilitated soldiers that I witnessed everywhere before were left there just to be bones. I felt the horrors of war.