CHAPTER 8

‘WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER’ (1946–1947)

We, the remaining five, were not in the right frame of mind to celebrate the new year of 1946, fearing US mopping-up operations and preoccupied with our subsistence. The Americans sang songs in a relaxed fashion when they patrolled the banks of the River Talofofo. Probably because they were too well provided for, they left behind lots of food, even some unopened cans of food, in places where they took rests. After they left, we picked up their leftovers and ate them. We felt utterly miserable and degraded doing so. But we had to eat.

Some remains of Japanese camping huts were seen here and there. They had been abandoned apparently under US pressure. It seemed that a substantial number of Japanese were still wandering in that area at that time. There was a hill of coconut shells and a pile of bones of a few cows. ‘After having created such a situation’, I thought, ‘it would be difficult to fail to be spotted.’

While we were scouting stealthily, we found the remains of the position of our Epidemic Control and Water Supply Squad. It appeared as if they had to run under the fire of a US mopping-up operation. A body was lying, deserted under a soldier’s blanket. We closed our eyes and prayed for him. Pans and outdoor rice cookers were scattered around. But the Americans had shot them through rendering them unusable.

There were a lot of things to eat around the area. We found it hard to leave and stayed there longer than expected. By that time, there had already been talk of separation among us.
It was a long time before we lost Nagao and the other two. ‘Mr Yokoi’, Nihei told me, ‘because Nagao has a lens, he shows us his power.’ I do not like it. Take his lens away. We shall then leave him, shall we?’

At that time, only the late Nagao and I possessed a lens. My lens was taken from a torchlight which generated electricity by clockwork. This torch was too heavy for me to carry, so I took its lens with me. It was single-sided. Therefore, on most occasions, we used the late Nagao’s double-sided lens to make a fire. I was thinking that unless every member of us had the means of making a fire, there would be a lot of conflict among us. I was thinking very seriously of doing something about this issue. However, while we had a lens, we all depended on it.

This time, ‘Shimizu and Nihei seem to be conspiring over something’, Shichi told me, ‘they may be going to desert us.’ ‘If they want to desert us’, I said, ‘what is wrong with that?’ Actually, there was some difficulty between Shimizu and me because we had been called up at the same time and I was made a section leader before him. There was also trouble between Nihei and Shichi, who were thereafter very fractious together. Under the circumstances, I was expecting our group to break-up. Soon thereafter, ‘If Shimizu and Nihei are planning to desert us’, Shichi suggested to me, ‘we shall desert them before they do. But I would like to take Nakahata with us.’ I followed his suggestion.

One day, when Shimizu, Nihei and Nakahata were taking their turn to travel some distance to gather jungle potatoes, Shichi advised Nakahata, ‘Turn back on the path by saying that you have left something behind.’ As for Shichi and I, we were taking our turn to look after our hut. We waited for Nakahata’s return, took our personal belongings and departed. Shichi left a note to Nihei, ‘We are taking this and that . . .’

The sun had set and we walked slowly within a patch of unfamiliar jungle. Fortunately, we came across a potato field. We were delighted to dig potatoes. We roasted them to eat, kept the fire smoking to deter mosquitoes, and laid down on the ground, using cycad leaves as fans. ‘How are Nihei and Shimizu doing?’ I kept thinking of them and was unable to sleep that night.