In 1938, construction work began on the Musashi at the Mitsubishi Shipyard in Akunoura on the north side of Nagasaki Bay. Together with her sister ship Yamato she would be the largest battleship ever built. As the vessel took shape a short distance across the harbour from the streets of Nagasaki, Musashi symbolized a highly visible and thinly veiled message of intent, sweeping aside the international agreement on limiting naval expansion that Japan had signed in London eight years before. It also posed a sensitive issue for the local authorities, since the commercial prosperity of this former treaty port had been closely linked with the growth of the foreign settlement on the south side of the bay. A makeshift warehouse was even put up along the seafront facing the British Consulate in an attempt to mask the view of the battleship under construction across the water.

The grand villa built by Thomas Blake Glover in 1863 on the slopes of the Minami-Yamate district enjoys splendid views over this harbour. Originally from the small port of Fraserburgh in northern Scotland, Glover had become a powerful merchant in the foreign settlement after Nagasaki first opened as a treaty port seventy years before. The house had since passed into the hands of his son Tomisaburō, who was now in his late sixties having carved out a singular business career himself during the early years of the twentieth century. This had been his home for much of his life, but with the construction of Battleship Musashi underway he was relocated to a smaller building at the foot of the hill.

Tomisaburō was a prominent figure in a city where, over the years, the foreign community had become increasingly integrated with the native population. Half-Japanese himself, he was an active member of
the Naigai Club (International Club) formed in 1899 to create ‘a good understanding between the Japanese and foreign residents’ when Nagasaki lost its status as a treaty port. He was also the first person in the city to own a motor car, although its use was largely confined by the steep hills to a road along the seafront. The port itself was no longer the new frontier of commercial opportunity that it had once been in his father’s day. The handover to Japanese jurisdiction had been smooth enough and, at the turn of the new century, the number of foreign ships arriving was on the rise, with thirty-six Western saloons and nineteen hotels also open for business to cope with the demand. Trade dipped sharply after the Russo-Japanese War, however, and in 1907 Tomisaburō pointed out that locally-based businessmen were now exploring prospects in the Korean port of Chemulpo, as the government began to exploit land resources on the continent.

Tomisaburō’s later years encapsulate the change of mood in Nagasaki from a cosmopolitan city with an international outlook to a place where outsiders were treated with suspicion by the authorities. By the end of the 1920s Western influence had practically disappeared from the port, but this was due not so much to the closing of the foreign settlement as wider economic and political forces. Tomisaburō, for example, had helped to build Japan’s first public golf course on the uplands of Mt Unzen in the nearby Shimabara peninsula. When it opened in 1913 everything seemed to augur well for this hot spring area, popular among foreign tourists trying to escape the summer heat in treaty ports around the East China Sea. The opening of the picturesque Unzen Kanko Hotel in 1935, however, was not such a well-timed venture. The hotel register on display in the reception area shows the signatures of foreign guests who stayed there in its early years, but their numbers dwindled as the wartime regime took hold. By this stage Tomisaburō and the few remaining foreign residents were regularly being trailed through the streets of Nagasaki by members of the military police (kenpeitai). He never shook off their suspicions that he might be acting as a spy against the Japanese war effort.

Tomisaburō survived the atomic bomb that was dropped on the Urakami district of Nagasaki on 9 August 1945. Not only was the Mitsubishi Shipyard spared, but the old foreign settlement with its neo-colonial villas was far enough away to survive the worst of the damage. Mabel Shigeko Walker (née McMillan), another long-term resident who had stayed during the war, remembered seeing a light ‘as bright as the