Igniting Memory: Commemoration of the 1942 Japanese Bombing of Southern Oregon, 1962–1998

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Introduction

As the sun rose on September 9, 1942, Nabou Fujita, a veteran Japanese military aviator flying a single-engine floatplane launched by catapult from a submarine, dropped two 168-pound incendiary bombs in the Siskiyou National Forest near Mount Emily, eighteen miles east of Brookings, Oregon. Brookings is a quiet logging, harbor, and vacation town just north of the California border on the Pacific Ocean; its population in 1940 was just over five hundred. The mission, the brainchild of Fujita himself, had three

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objectives: to retaliate against the American bombing raid of Tokyo on April 18, 1942, to set forest fires and damage valuable American timber reserves, and to force the United States to reallocate resources and protect a suddenly panicked West Coast.

The mission failed on all counts. Only one bomb detonated, and due to unseasonable rains and alert Forest Service lookouts, the resulting small fire was easily extinguished. An American aircraft dive-bombed the submarine and inflicted minor damage, forcing the submarine's retreat. (Twenty days later, however, Fujita dropped two additional bombs farther north near the town of Port Orford. These bombs were duds and were never found.) The bombing did make Americans on the West Coast feel more vulnerable. And the FBI, falsely believing that Japan had smuggled floatplanes into the United States, scoured remote lakes in the region for nonexistent enemy bases. In the long run, however, the bombing did not engender reallocation of military resources toward domestic defense or otherwise alter U.S. strategy in the Pacific.

Nabou Fujita's attacks retain a place in military history as the only bombings of the mainland in United States history by manned aircraft.[1] But of more importance to public historians, the Mount Emily bombing, and more precisely commemoration of it, became a unique vehicle through which former enemies became friends.[2] Fujita's transformation from enemy to ally began in 1962, when he accepted a shocking and controversial invitation from boosters in Brookings to visit their town's annual celebration, and ended just recently, when he died an honorary citizen of Brookings and his family scattered some of his ashes at the bombsite. In the interim, the community contested the memory of the bombing during a campaign by an author to place a historical marker at the bombsite in the 1970s, a visit by Brookings students to Fujita in Tokyo in the 1980s, and three additional trips to Brookings from Fujita in the 1990s.

Several individuals promoted remembrance of the bombing, but Fujita himself was ultimately the indispensible memory-worker. Fujita's four visits to Brookings and other commemorative activities produced a new text for the 1942 bombing, a mixture of new memories and older memories of the

1. For a detailed narrative of Fujita's missions and other Japanese activity on the West Coast during World War II, see Bert Webber, *Silent Siege III: Japanese Attacks on North America in World War II* (Medford, Oreg.: Webber Research Group, 1992).

2. As the recent Enola Gay controversy so poignantly demonstrated, commemorations of America's major wars offer especially fruitful opportunities to examine the relationship between the past and representations of the past. For a specific look at the Enola Gay controversy, see Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996). As this essay developed, readers suggested that I draw comparisons between commemoration of Fujita's bombing, which ended in friendship, and commemoration of the atomic bombings, which led to the Enola Gay debacle. But the utility of such a comparison is limited. In short, Fujita's bombing was a harmless incident that easily found a home in America's "Good War" narrative. I would also add here that making peace with a former enemy and confronting a sacred interpretation of a nation's own actions in war are incongruent processes.

original attack. Due to his efforts—which both drove and were facilitated by a receptive community—the memory of his bombing was no longer (significantly) contested by the 1980s. Instead, Fujita and Brookings had successfully infused the bombing with a message of international friendship. This essay, then, contributes to the study of history and memory primarily because it fosters exploration of a less-studied facet of commemoration: the ability of actors in commemorated events to reshape, at a later date, the memory of their own actions.[3]

Détente: The 1962 Azalea Festival

Unsurprisingly, commemoration of Fujita's bombing originated in local boosterism.[4] In the summer of 1961, Doug Peterson was president of the Brookings Junior Chamber of Commerce, or Jaycees. He had the idea of drawing tourists to the upcoming 1962 Azalea Festival, the town's annual Memorial Day weekend celebration, by sponsoring a visit from the Mount Emily bomber.[5] The Jaycees anticipated that their plan to bring Fujita to Oregon would be controversial, and they kept "Project X" a secret while they contacted Fujita through Japanese authorities and invited him.[6]

After the war Fujita, who lost a brother in the war and received no special accolades for his daring missions over America, had started a hardware store and raised a family in a Tokyo suburb. In February 1962, the retired pilot announced that he had accepted the invitation, and international wire services picked up the story.[7] In late February, the Jaycees formally unveiled

3. For general entries into the rich and rapidly expanding literature on history and memory, see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); and Professor Kammen's review essay in *History & Theory* 34, no. 3 (1995): 245–61; John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, eds., *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); David Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," *The Public Historian* 18 (Spring 1996): 7–23; and "Roundtable: Responses to David Glassberg's 'Public History and the Study of Memory,'" *The Public Historian* 19 (Spring 1997): 31–72. Stanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), provides an original look at history and memory from a legal perspective.

4. For a discussion of the interplay between commercial enterprise and historical memory, see Kammen, *Mystic Chords*, especially 672–88.

5. Doug Peterson, personal interview, 24 February 1998. Peterson's decision was part of the town's larger effort at the time to promote its tourism industry: the new highway 101 had just been completed and timber production was down.

6. Before they would provide Fujita's address, six representatives from the Japanese Consulate in Portland visited Brookings, apparently convinced that the town wanted to try Fujita as a war criminal (*Curry Coastal Pilot*, 4 October 1997). In 1978, the name of the local newspaper changed to the *Curry Coastal Pilot* from the *Brookings-Harbor Pilot*. Hereafter, I will refer to both newspapers as the *Pilot*.

7. According to the *Pilot*, Fujita recalled that although he anticipated being egged and beaten at the airport, he decided that "it would have been impolite to refuse the invitation." *Pilot*, 30 May 1990.

their plan and the creation of a private fundraising campaign to secure the $3,000 needed to bring Fujita and his family to Oregon.

There was immediate and virulent opposition to "Project X." Indeed, if the actual bombing had created Fujita as enemy, the invitation only previewed the construction of Fujita as ally. Much of the opposition, but not all, came from veterans organizations; in 1962, 41 percent of the Curry County male population over age 14 had served in the nation's armed forces during wartime.[8] Chamber of Commerce President Peterson received death threats addressed to "Jap-lover," and half the school board boycotted his pharmacy.[9] Strong anti-Japanese sentiments did not disappear from America after the war, despite the mitigation of the most appalling ethnic stereotypes.[10]

In the face of this public-relations crisis, the Jaycees made a major strategic decision. Pointing out that the project fell within its "International Relations portfolio," and highlighting the Jaycee creed that "the brotherhood of man transcends the sovereignty of nations," they adopted a new bifurcated agenda for the proposed visit: promotion of Brookings on one hand and promotion of international understanding on the other. On March 1, the Jaycees published a mission statement in the *Brookings-Harbor Pilot,* the local newspaper. They held: "Our international relations with the people of Japan would be favorably affected [by Fujita's visit]. At the same time, the resultant publicity of the project would draw attention . . . to this small community."[11]

Opponents of the proposed visit had two primary objections. They feared that the Jaycees would somehow make a hero out of a former enemy, and they maintained that the $3,000 for his transportation could be spent more wisely within the community. In a *Pilot* poll, one opponent put it simply: "[He] could have killed us."[12] A letter to the editor recommended using the money for the annual "Scout Smorgasbord" or a skating rink to combat juvenile delinquency.[13] Several World War I veterans wrote: "The fact that his bomb was a dud . . . does not detract from his moral guilt of being on a mission of death, maiming and destruction. To us, an invitation to Fidel Castro or erecting a monument to John Wilkes Booth would be just as sensible."[14] On March 8, opponents of the Jaycees ran a full-page petition in the *Pilot* protesting what they saw as the Jaycees' "shameless quest for publicity."[15]

8. *Pilot*, 30 August 1962.
9. Doug Peterson, personal interview, 24 February 1998.
10. For a general discussion of the ethnic stereotypes Americans and Japanese constructed of each other, see John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986). For the specific postwar malleability of these stereotypes, see 301–17.
11. *Pilot*, 1 March 1962.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. *Pilot*, 8 March 1962.

The *Pilot* galvanized local support for the plan. An editorial entitled "Much Ado About Nabou" argued that the $3,000 investment would return $300,000 worth of publicity and stressed that no public money would be appropriated. It also confirmed the primacy of commercial motivations by suggesting that while the trip would foster peace, "whether international relations would be bettered is a secondary result of the trip." Despite its generally positive tone, however, the editorial flirted with anti-Japanese rhetoric and could not resist rubbing Fujita's nose in the failure of his mission. "We would be intensely interested in meeting Fujita—despite his nationality and background—and hearing him recount his daring tale of one of the biggest bombing flops in history."[16]

Many Brookings residents who supported the Jaycees utilized Cold War rhetoric, fueled by the rapid rapprochement between the United States and Japan after World War II. One letter to the editor suggested that Fujita's visit would demonstrate to the world that the pilot "doesn't believe Communist propaganda that says Americans are cruel and war-loving."[17] Letters urging Brookings to demonstrate the "American way" of extending the hand of friendship support historian John Dower's assertion that after the war Americans constructed an image of the Japanese as "good-pupils" of democracy.[18]

The Cold War also contributed, especially in 1962, to a striking aspect of all commemorations of Fujita's bombing: the suppression of references to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[19] As the Cold War escalated, the United States and Japan had a "bilateral agenda" of minimizing the atomic bombings.[20] But the suppression of the atomic bombings was more than a function of the Cold War; it also protected the American view of World War II as the "Good War," the just war for democracy that the United States waged in a manner beyond reproach. To be sure, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have often been smoothly assimilated into the "Good War" narrative as the morally unambiguous savior of lives. Yet they also have had the capacity to pose a serious threat to the narrative—and they have had this capacity since detonation, despite the claims of some during the recent Enola Gay controversy that 1990s historians are the first skeptics of the use of the bomb. Understandably, then, all parties in the Brookings story, including Fujita, ignored the atomic bombings as they successfully sanitized and depoliticized Fujita's attack. Thus, as they reversed the gradual and passive decay of memory over time—what may be

16. *Pilot*, 1 March 1962.
17. *Pilot*, 8 March 1962.
18. See Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 302.
19. One supporter of the Jaycees reminded Brookings that the United States "killed thousands of innocent women and children at Hiroshima" and another said that she had lived in Japan for seven months and had not "heard one word against the men who dropped [the] A-bombs." *Pilot*, 8 March 1962. Such observations, however, were anomalous during the initial controversy and nearly unheard of during the subsequent thirty-five years of commemoration.
20. John Dower, "Three Narratives of our Humanity," in Linenthal and Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars*, 68.

called "simple forgetting" or "passive amnesia"—they ironically fostered a second kind of amnesia identified by Michael Kammen—the active burial of some memories through the emphasis on others.[21]

Powerful individuals and organizations outside of Brookings lent their support. Before the controversy erupted, the Jaycees had sent queries to the United States State Department, the ambassador to Japan, and the United States Information Agency, and all approved the plan. The State Department held: "There can be no overestimating the extent to which direct, people-to-people projects of this kind have been a positive force for greater international understanding."[22] Governor Mark Hatfield, in a letter to the mayor of Brookings printed on the first page of the *Pilot*, stressed the economic implications of the visit as well as the virtues of forgiveness. "We seek trade outlets for our production here in Oregon,"[23] he wrote. And at the end of March (after Fujita had been definitively invited), President Kennedy's office wrote Brookings to applaud the upcoming visit. Like some local residents, Kennedy saw the potential event in geopolitical terms. The White House communiqué said that Fujita's visit would support the Japanese-American partnership that "serves as a source of stability in the Far East."[24]

The advocacy of these outside politicians raises a larger issue related to the study of historical memory: the possible tension between the forces of national (or state) and local remembrance. There is always the possibility, that is, that national forces may try to reconfigure local memories to serve their own agendas. Although one is wise to note this possibility, one must conclude that tension between local and extra-local custodians of memories (or memories themselves) was not a crucial component of this story. To be sure, the United States State Department, Governor Hatfield, and the Jaycees each wanted Fujita to come to America for their own and somewhat different reasons. Moreover, many residents viewed these high-level gestures of support with healthy doses of skepticism. But overall, "official" (or civic) memory in Brookings has largely converged with "official" national (and Oregon) memory.

During the spring of 1962, a lack of funds seriously threatened the visit, even though contributions arrived from as far away as Florida. The local Veterans of Foreign Wars reaffirmed its stand against the aviator's visit.[25] Meanwhile, Nabou Fujita's son, who served as his father's translator, told Brookings that his family was embarrassed by the controversy but cognizant

21. For a discussion of historical amnesia, see Kammen, *Mystic Chords*, especially 9–14, 531–36, and 655–708.

22. *Pilot*, 1 March 1962.

23. *Pilot*, 8 March 1962.

24. *Pilot*, 29 March 1962.

25. The VFW commander suggested, as an alternative to the Jaycee plan, "a youth project in the community open to all races and creeds." *Pilot*, 15 March 1962. Given the lack of ethnic diversity in the community, this comment suggests that the VFW felt under pressure to distance themselves from charges of racism.

of "a greater meaning and responsibility . . . to meet such people who don't know the fact that we Japanese people can make friends with you American people."[26] Fujita's son also referred to Cold War imperatives; he suggested that friendship between Japan and the United States was needed to block the "red aggression of the communist countries."[27] As late as April 26, the Jaycees had raised less than half of the $3,000, but a last-minute rally in the first week of May finally permitted them to offer Fujita a formal invitation.[28]

Many in the community feared the possibility of violence during the visit. The *Pilot* ran an article entitled "Speculation Raised on Fujita Safety,"[29] but several people interviewed for this essay mentioned that the newspaper understated the sense of crisis in Brookings; residents openly threatened to send Fujita back to Japan in a box. In a thinly veiled statement on the eve of the visit, the Jaycees announced that they were "counting on the generous nature and hospitality of the citizens of the community of Brookings to make the stay of the Fujitas a happy and memorable occasion."[30]

By all accounts, the Fujitas' week-long stay in Brookings was an unmitigated success. Fujita was honorary grand marshal of the Azalea Festival, and he flew over the forest where he had dropped the bombs in 1942. His visit climaxed when he presented to the city his family's 400-year-old samurai sword, an heirloom he had taped into the cockpit on all of his flights. "This is the finest way of closing the story," Fujita told *Time* magazine (ironically, in retrospect, given his subsequent efforts to keep the story open-ended). "It is in the finest of samurai traditions to pledge peace and friendship by submitting the sword to a former enemy."[31] Although most residents called the sword a "symbol of regret" or "gift of apology," themes which have been echoed in the press ever since, Fujita's decision to bring the sword may have been motivated more by the virulent opposition to his visit than by the sword's symbolic importance. In the words of *The New York Times*, Fujita's daughter claimed in 1997 that her father "had decided to carry the sword so that if necessary he could appease their fury by committing ritual suicide, disemboweling himself with the sword in the traditional Japanese method known as seppuku."[32] Like the suppression of the atomic bombings, Brookings's generous interpretation of Fujita's gift as a token of repentance—over and above a traditional gesture of peace—contributed to the maintenance of the "Good War" narrative. In later years, however, Fujita increasingly supported this narrative, however unknowingly. His public statements usually combined regret for the senselessness of all war and apology for his specific bombing, and his sense of remorse seems to have increased with old age.

26. *Pilot*, 22 March 1962.
27. Ibid.
28. *Pilot*, 3 May 1962.
29. *Pilot*, 10 May 1962.
30. *Pilot*, 24 May 1962.
31. *Time*, 25 May 1962, 29.
32. *The New York Times*, 3 October 1997.

The Jaycees could not have purchased better publicity. The Azalea Festival itself smashed attendance records (although it ran a small deficit[33]) and *Time* magazine and CBS television carried the story. The Associated Press identified the bifurcated goals of the event, labeling it a commercial venture but also an "international goodwill gesture of more than passing interest."[34] Although FBI agents were in town as a precaution, there were no visible protests. His transformation into an ally was inchoate, but Fujita was no longer an enemy. At the end of a week presiding over the Azalea Festival and touring southern Oregon, the Fujitas promised to open their home in Japan to students from Brookings; twenty-three years passed before they could fulfill this pledge.

Detachment: The 1970s Movement for a Historical Marker

During the remainder of the 1960s, the bombing and Fujita's subsequent visit faded—but did not entirely disappear—from collective memory in Brookings. Fujita maintained private relationships with several Brookings residents and entertained some in Japan. The town kept the samurai sword on permanent display, first in a bank and then in the newly completed city hall.

The next turning point in the bombing memory's reconstruction was a movement in the early 1970s to erect a historical marker at the bombsite. The precise origins of this renewed interest in Fujita's attack are not clear. For whatever reason, in 1970, Charles Hoffman, new president of the Brookings Chamber of Commerce, exchanged letters with the local Forest Service office in Brookings (called the Chetco Ranger District) about the possibility of locating and signing the bombsite in the Siskiyou National Forest.[35] But the project did not immediately materialize. Two years later, Bert Webber, a photojournalist from Medford, Oregon, and author of more than eighty books on everything Oregon, reopened the Fujita-related story in earnest when Oregon State University Press encouraged him to write a book about Japanese attacks on the West Coast during World War II. Although Webber initially sought commemoration of Fujita's attack to sell this book, his research provided a major impetus for remembrance of the bombing and contributed to the pilot's transformation from enemy to ally.

For thirty years, no one had paid any attention to the remote and rugged bombsite, a few miles southwest of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area. During August 1972, however, Webber organized and led a search party into the

33. *Pilot*, 21 June 1962.
34. *Pilot*, 7 June 1962.
35. Charles Hoffman to Russ Kahre (Chetco District Ranger), 28 September 1970. Mahlon Nichols (Resource Assistant) to Hoffman, 5 October 1970. I thank Tex Martinek, who works in today's Chetco District office, for letting me view the historical file on the bombsite.

forest that successfully identified the spot with the aid of 1942 photographs. The party included current employees of the Siskiyou National Forest and a retired Assistant Forest Supervisor who had helped coordinate the response to the forest fire in 1942. Webber may not have been the very first to propose revisiting the site, but as the Forest Service's press release stated, he "was very instrumental in generating interest in searching for the bomb drop site."[36]

Two factors other than Webber's initiative also contributed to the renewal of interest in the bombing during the early 1970s. First, attention to an unrelated 1945 crash of a Navy patrol bomber in the southwestern Oregon woods stirred interest in the region's overall World War II experience. The *Brookings-Harbor Pilot* summer 1971 vacation guide told tourists how to reach the concrete marker erected at the sight of the tragedy in 1957.[37] Webber, in fact, wrote an article in a Portland, Oregon, newspaper about the relatively unknown concrete marker.[38] Second, the simple passage of time—and more specifically, the aging of those on the scene in 1942—created a sense that unless the area commemorated the bombing immediately, it would slip from collective memory. The retired assistant supervisor, for example, was particularly active along with Webber in planning the expedition.

The successful rediscovery of the bombsite generated significant momentum for a historical marker, and for a few months construction of one seemed likely.[39] Webber lobbied the Siskiyou Forest Supervisor and a nationwide increase in commemorative projects in the years leading up to the bicentennial perhaps contributed to the momentum. Webber suggested modeling the "Brookings project" after an existing granite monument in northern Oregon at a site shelled by a Japanese submarine, and he made assurances that the project could be completed without Forest Service funds. Webber was also promoting his own interest when he suggested that "the need for this trail and monument will be instantly upon us once my book is completed."[40] The Forest Service promised their assistance to Webber and indicated their sincerity internally.[41]

The movement to construct a monument gradually lost momentum, however, for three reasons. First, the Forest Service did not energetically facilitate the project. The Chetco District office eventually completed the trail to the bombsite in the summer of 1974,[42] but agency interest in more elaborate commemoration waned after one Forest Service employee who

36. Press release, Chetco Ranger District, 15 August 1972.
37. The *Pilot* published this special issue every May. See p. 40 of the 1971 guide.
38. *Oregon Journal,* 31 January 1971.
39. Forest Service memos indicate that Webber had actually convinced the agency of the need for a sign even before the expedition. Lola Ward to Kahre, 11 May 1972.
40. Webber to William Ronayne (Forest Supervisor), 1 November 1972.
41. Ronayne to Webber, 13 November 1972, and Kahre to Ronayne, 1 December 1972.
42. Joe Waller (Resource Assistant) to Webber, 25 June 1974.

participated in the expedition to the bombsite was reassigned and another retired.[43] Webber's ambitious and logistically complicated project, which included new paved roads, and a parking area, also would have been expensive; the Forest Service estimate even for a simpler plan was $50,000 to $70,000.[44] Although there is no evidence that cost was the determining factor, clearly the project would have required the utilization of significant financial (and thus human) resources to have been completed, and the Forest Service passed on to Webber the task of fundraising.[45] Second, although several disparate organizations found their names attached to the project, the monument plans stalled because none ultimately stepped forward to take the lead.[46]

Above all, Webber's elaborate bombsite plans failed because Brookings residents largely ignored them. The town was apathetic toward the bombing during these years and unconcerned with commemorating it. Not once did the *Pilot* mention any planning for the monument.[47] There is no evidence that the lingering resentment toward Fujita, rather than apathy, undergirded the town's lack of interest in a historical marker. Webber's commemorative campaign, after all, was more concerned with military history than with lionizing the pilot. There is evidence, however, that some Brookings residents, among the minority that cared, actively resented

43. Webber, personal interview, 14 March 1998. Joe Waller replaced Gus Nichols (Resource Assistant), who was transferred to the Deschutes National Forest office in Bend, Oregon. Waller to Webber, 25 June 1974, suggests that the departure of Nichols left monument plans at square one. Russ Kahre retired.

44. Kahre to Ronayne, 1 December 1972.

45. In April 1973, the Chetco office wrote to a woman in Colorado who had inquired about the monument: "At the present time a plaque has not yet been erected. Mr. Bert Webber . . . is presently working to get funds to build a monument on this historical site." Jack Valentine (Forestry Technician) to Dolores Johnson, 18 April 1973. The next year Webber told the Forest Service that his ambitious plans were fizzling because of "no funding." Webber to Waller, 27 June 1974.

46. Webber wrote in a September 1973 letter to the Chetco Ranger District office, "Plans are still in somewhat of a state of flux about exactly by whom and when, a monument will be installed on Wheeler Ridge, unless you have information that has not yet reached me." Webber to Nichols, 14 September 1973. Indeed, the correspondence between Webber and the Forest Service mentioned the following groups as potential sponsors (or actual builders) of the monument: engineers from the Oregon National Guard, a group of artillery veterans from World War II, a "national Forest Service fund for historical sites," the National Trust (which catalogues historic sites) and the National Bicentennial Commission—which, according to one Forest Service memo, was at one point willing to spend $15,000–$18,000 on the bombsite. Phil [no last name] to Kahre, 3 October 1974. The precise involvement of all of these actors is impossible to determine, but Webber concluded that the only group that actively advocated the monument was the ad hoc group of men who relocated the bombsite in August 1972. Webber, personal interview, 14 March 1998.

47. The only reference to a possible monument in the coastal-area press, curiously, was in a 1973 article in the *Coos Bay World* that reported, "Interest locally has indicated a marker may be established this coming year." I found this article in the file on the bomb story in the Chetco Valley Community Library in Brookings. Date unknown. Courtesy of Brenda Jacques.

Webber's crusade—out of both residual anger at the bombing and distrust of an outsider.[48]

The Forest Service's apathy and delay continually frustrated Webber. Similar to the 1962 Jaycees, who fused promotional and "international relations" goals, Webber had overlapping intentions of selling his book and fostering local knowledge of Oregon's place in World War II history. He was exasperated that his book was nearly done before the construction of a monument.[49] After the Forest Service ignored Webber's admonitions, he added gentle warning to his pleas for construction. He explained that his book would "generate a lot of interest and visitors" and that a marker was needed "in order to avoid bad PR" for the Forest Service.[50]

In 1975, without consulting Webber, the Forest Service finally marked the trail leading to the bombsite and erected a historical sign.[51] In lieu of an elaborate granite monument, a simple wooden sign, without any governmental logo, proclaimed:

JAPANESE BOMBSITE

ONLY JAPANESE BOMB DROPPED ON THE CONTINENTAL U.S. DURING WORLD WAR II SEPTEMBER 9, 1942

In June 1975, Fujita's son visited the bombsite during a business trip to the United States. Bert Webber toured the young Fujita around Oregon to promote his just-published book.[52] In that same year, meanwhile, Webber visited the senior Fujita in Japan; the bomb story's two crucial memory-workers remained friends and exchanged Christmas cards until Fujita died.[53]

Webber rejuvenated the memory of the bombing and the 1962 visit, but during the late 1970s, the memory of these events once again became dormant. The bomb memory did receive a minor boost in 1982 when the

48. Evidence suggests that Webber was disconcerted by the town's lack of interest in its World War II history. In one of his letters to the Forest Service, Webber criticized Brookings's inadequate promotion of the samurai sword housed in the city hall. "No one takes any care of [the sword's myrtlewood showcase]," he wrote, "and the things need cleaning and the purple sash (rag!) therein needs replacing." The sword, he also noted, was displayed in a building "closed a good portion of tourist time." Webber to Waller, 27 June 1974. And in his original 1975 book, *Retaliation: Japanese Attacks and Allied Countermeasures on the Pacific Coast in World War II* (Corvallis, Oreg.: Oregon State University Press, 1975), 164, Webber wrote that some Brookings residents, by the 1970s, had confused in their memory the 1942 bombing and the 1945 crash of the navy airplane. This claim (somewhat valid, I have concluded) angered some individuals in Brookings.

49. Webber wrote to the Forest Service in a 1973 letter: "For the purposes of my book, I'm sure you will agree, I need to say that there is a marker of some kind." Webber to Nichols, 14 September 1973.

50. Webber to Waller, 27 June 1974.

51. Webber, personal interview, 14 March 1998.

52. *Pilot*, 19 June 1975.

53. Webber, personal interview, 14 March 1998.

Forest Service erected a new, equally modest wooden sign at the bombsite. Still standing, it reads:

JAPANESE BOMBSITE

DROP SITE OF ONE OF FOUR BOMBS DROPPED
ON THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES BY
SUBMARINE-LAUNCHED AIRCRAFT DURING W.W.II
SEPTEMBER 9, 1942

The addition of "submarine-launched aircraft" makes the sign superior to its predecessor, which, given the detonation of many Japanese balloon bombs on the West Coast during the war, was inaccurate.

Dōmei: The Alliance between Fujita and Brookings, 1984–1998

In October 1984, Nabou Fujita guaranteed the completion of his transformation from enemy to ally when he unexpectedly issued an invitation to host three Brookings students on a visit to Japan. Fujita, recall, had promised after he left Brookings in 1962 that he would reciprocate the hospitality shown to him during the Azalea Festival. His plans stalled when his business deteriorated sharply in the 1970s and went bankrupt in 1979, but at the time of the invitation he had recovered and become vice-president of a large manufacturing company. When three Brookings High School juniors arrived in Tokyo in July 1985, Fujita's gesture of repayment had snowballed into a major media event; several Japanese companies and organizations eventually sponsored various events on the students' itinerary. The young women attended a science and technology exposition outside of Tokyo and toured Fujita's factory.

National figures again entered the bomb story without causing tension. Mike Moran, Brookings Chamber of Commerce president, went along as a chaperone and town promoter and presented Fujita with an autographed picture of President Reagan and an American flag flown over the United States Capitol. Reagan's letter to Moran indicated that he was moved by the story, fascinated by Fujita's place in aviation history, and convinced that the event might nominally help trade relations with Japan.[54] Brookings's dual motives of promotion and peace ensured that national and local forces of memory were symbiotic. The *Pilot* called the visit a "combination public relations and good-will visit" and noted the "opportunity to tell a wide audience about our scenic area."[55] The delegation kept the promotional tradition alive by distributing Brookings-area press kits as they traveled through Japan. Once again, the small city of Brookings had created more

54. Mike Moran, personal interview, 25 March 1998.
55. *Pilot*, 3 July 1985.

publicity, on both sides of the ocean, than it ever could have expected. Dan Rather reported the story on the "CBS Evening News."

The student visit to Japan was the key turning point in the transformation from enemies to friends because it noticeably reduced latent hostility toward Fujita.[56] His remarkable gesture of honoring his promise, despite a business failure, was not lost on the town. A member of the Jaycees in 1962 said that after the tour Fujita "became a part of the community."[57] Fujita told *Time* magazine that after he hosted the students "the war will finally be over for me,"[58] but Fujita's commemorative crusade, and his friendship with Brookings, had just begun.

In the spring of 1990, Fujita himself proposed another visit, and the Chamber of Commerce again invited the "old-enemy-made-old-friend"[59] to serve as grand marshal during the Brookings Azalea Festival. A tepid protest from some veterans ensued. One letter-writer argued that Fujita's visit would only dredge up painful memories of Japanese atrocities.[60] Another suggested that he would carry his grudge against the Japanese, "a money power doing their utmost to buy our country," until the day he died.[61] As in 1962, some veterans were upset that Fujita's visit coincided with Memorial Day. But the widespread animosity of previous years was not present. Even a member of a national organization called the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association stated, "I have seen nothing yet to cause me to oppose the visit of Mr. Fujita."[62] A memorable moment of the 1990 visit came during the Azalea Parade when a group of U.S. military vehicles passed Fujita's reviewing stand. Fujita, with an American flag in his pocket, waved at the veterans, who waved back. Still, a comment by the driver of the lead vehicle reminds us that the triumph-of-goodwill analysis should not be pushed too far. After the parade, he downplayed the veterans' gesture and told reporters that Fujita was "still a Jap."[63]

During this visit, Brookings residents revealed the new, less contentious meaning of the bombing by vying frantically with one another for Fujita's time and attention. But perhaps an appetizer served at one of the receptions captures best the dramatically reconstructed memory of the bombing: "a 'submarine' sandwich topped by a plane made of pickle slices, complete with an olive half for the pilot's helmet."[64] As enemies became friends, the

56. My interviewees arrived at a consensus on this point.
57. Dick Guthrie, personal interview, 24 February 1998.
58. *Time*, 15 July 1985, 45.
59. *Pilot*, 7 March 1990.
60. *Pilot*, 14 March 1990.
61. *Pilot*, 28 March 1990. Protectionist "Japan-bashing" indeed increased in the 1980s. The Oregon coast, for example, was hurt as Japan increasingly imported raw logs instead of finished wood products. Still, the pseudo-economic argument quoted above was not recurring, at least in the press, and trade issues played at most a tangential role in this story. For a discussion of recent American attitudes toward Japan, see Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 301–17.
62. *Pilot*, 28 March 1990.
63. *Pilot*, 30 May 1990.
64. Ibid.

bombing became suitable fare for kitsch; Fujita was evidently very amused by this culinary folklorization of war. The ex-pilot gave the town several streamers decorated with carp and $1,000 from the employees of his company for the children of Brookings. He had breakfast with the three former students whom he had sponsored in Japan. A *Pilot* editorial suggested that any controversy prior to this visit "seemed even more ridiculous once the man himself arrived." And, perhaps responding to residual doubt in the community, the newspaper argued that his was a "one-man campaign for peace" without "any indication of any personal gain or hidden agenda."[65] Bert Webber, meanwhile, was present in Brookings during the Azalea Festival, but he did not play a prominent role during this or Fujita's two remaining visits.

In 1992, Fujita returned for the fiftieth anniversary of his mission and planted a redwood seedling where he had once started a fire. The tree-planting was his idea, and perhaps his most brilliant stroke as a memory-worker. It tinged the 1992 reunion with a message of environmental as well as international atonement. "Fifty years have passed since the U.S.-Japan war," he had written earlier to friends in Brookings. "What a stupid war we did! I believe that our most important mission is to make the past history known correctly, to reflect on what should be reflected, to forget the hatred [and] to cooperate for man's happiness and the maintenance of the earth."[66] In a short statement read in front of Brookings officials, Forest Service personnel, and family members, Fujita said that he had been tormented for years because he had tried to damage the forest. "So this is the finest day of my life," he concluded.[67] Fujita stressed the futility of all war, but this symbolic act of environmental atonement also adroitly demonstrated remorse for his personal participation, thereby allowing those lingering few who resisted the new meaning of the bombing to reconcile it with the "Good War" narrative of World War II. The *Pilot* predicted that Fujita's visit would "likely rekindle some of the deep-rooted anti-Japanese sentiments some local veterans still hold,"[68] but there was no organized opposition to his presence.

The 1992 visit also saw the acceleration of a multicultural theme to the legacy of the bombing. Fujita's company previously had given $2,000 to the local library for the acquisition of children's books on non-Western cultures, and on this occasion it gave $3,000. The city, which had on previous visits given Fujita Americana, now gave him a locally carved sculpture of "a blue heron, which is a Japanese symbol of long life and happiness."[69] The ascendancy of the environmental and multicultural themes during the 1992

65. Ibid.
66. *Pilot*, 9 September 1992.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. *Pilot*, 12 September 1992. The sculpture was more likely of a stork. The blue heron resembles the stork, of course, but only the latter symbolizes longevity.

visit revealed the ever-widening chasm in meaning between the original historic event (the bombing) and commemoration of it (Fujita's later visits).

The tree-planting anniversary shifted regional promotion of the bomb story into high gear. The bombsite itself received reinvigorated attention. The Forest Service spruced up the site for the 1992 visit, and in 1993 they added next to the wooden sign a display board that details the ongoing bomb story. The agency relied heavily upon Bert Webber's books for the narrative on the new board.[70] The board focuses on the 1942 bombing, but it mentions Fujita's 1992 visit and includes his statement about "the maintenance of the earth."

Brookings invited Fujita again in 1994 for the dedication ceremony of a new state historical marker located just off the highway (U.S. 101) that runs through town. Fujita declined due to poor health. The marker, among the first of a new series of state-sponsored historical boards nicknamed "Beaver Boards,"[71] and co-sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, sparked renewed controversy. The American Dreadnoughts, an area club of World War II battleship sailors but not an official veterans organization, led opposition to the marker. The disapproval of a small percentage of veterans demonstrated that the transition from enemy to ally was not linear and would never be complete, but in light of the reconstituted memory of the bombing, most observers dismissed the protests as petty.[72] Fujita sent a message for the occasion. "The [bomb]site reflects another folly in war," the ex-pilot declared in absentia, once again adding to a general denunciation of war a subtle apology for his actions. "But what's elating is that [the bombing] has become a symbol of peace between the U.S. and Japan."[73] The historical marker, designed by an American World War II veteran, depicts the Japanese submarine with the floatplane on top of it.

A final burst of commemorative activity came in 1995. Fujita traveled to Brookings for a final time this year to relocate his sword from the city hall to a custom-built case in the new library. Leaders in Brookings had decided that more people would have the opportunity to view the sword in the library, where Fujita continued to be a benefactor of the children's wing. In the library, Fujita momentarily unsheathed the ancestral sword, returned it to its scabbard, and placed it in the case next to a decorative shuttlecock that he had sent in 1993. He told the crowd, "I came here to bomb, but I am sorry."[74] The highlight of this visit undoubtedly occurred when Fujita, unable to hike into the forest due to his declining health, flew over the

70. Tex Martinek (Chetco Ranger District), personal interview, 26 February 1998.

71. In 1991, the Oregon legislature breathed new life into highway markers by transferring the dormant Historical Marker Program, formerly under the Oregon Department of Transportation, to the state Travel Information Council. See Kathleen Dawson, "Beaver Boards are Coming—to a State Highway Near You," *Oregon History Magazine* 38 (Summer 1994): 8.

72. Les Cohen (Chamber of Commerce President in 1994), personal interview, 26 February 1998, and others.

73. *Pilot*, 25 May 1994.

74. *Pilot*, 27 May 1995.

bombsite with a former World War II fighter-pilot and momentarily took control of the craft. In a speech read by a Forest Service ranger at the bombsite, Fujita wrote, "It is precisely 50 long years after the war ended across the Pacific Ocean. I offer my deepest prayers now for the repose of all those who died in the war."[75]

Also in 1995, the Forest Service, in collaboration with the Brookings Chamber of Commerce and local historical and environmental groups, created a "Self-Guided Forest Ecology Tour" that originates at the highway marker and ends at the trailhead to the bombsite, which the brochure calls "one of the most unique historical sites in the United States."[76] An audiocassette guides drivers through twenty points of interest ranging from a tree plantation to a waterfall. The formerly reluctant Forest Service, in other words, was now serving as a sponge-like repository for the memory-work. When the community reached a consensus that the bombing was worth remembering, the agency became a much more welcome co-sponsor of commemoration than it had been in the early 1970s, when Bert Webber could not beg a sign from them.

Fujita fell gravely ill in September 1997. The town sent a representative to Tokyo to deliver a proclamation declaring Fujita an honorary citizen of Brookings. The proclamation stated, "Fujita's striving to create a bond of peace, through the sharing of our two cultures, has left an indelible mark on this city which will last for generations to come."[77] Fujita received obituaries in *People* and *Time* magazines and *The New York Times*, among other publications. In October 1998, Fujita's daughter came to Brookings and scattered some of her father's ashes at the bombsite.[78]

Conclusion

This essay has traced how an act of war became an unusual opportunity for friendship though commemoration. Three main factors contributed to the reconstruction of the memory of Fujita's bombing. The first was local boosterism, as Brookings leaders mobilized the past to promote the Azalea Festival. The second was Bert Webber's efforts to secure a historical marker at the bombsite to promote his book. This persistent commercialism, however, need not make one overly cynical about the bombing's commemoration. In fact, the story here demonstrates that the quest for profit may sometimes complement the quest for loftier objectives such as trans-Pacific friendship. Whereas the use of history for commerce has been widely

75. *Medford Tribune*, 27 May 1995.

76. "Self-Guided Forest Ecology Tour: Chetco River to the Bomb Site Trail," a brochure by the United States Forest Service, Chetco Ranger District. Printed 31 March 1996.

77. "Proclamation of the Common Council of Brookings, Oregon." Courtesy of Brenda Jacques, Chetco Valley Community Library.

78. *The Register Guard* (Eugene, Oreg.), 11 October 1998.

criticized, less attention has been given to an opposite phenomenon present here—the appropriation of commercial events such as the Azalea Festival in the reconstruction of historical memory.

The broader implications of this essay relate to the unique role of an unknown Japanese pilot. Nabou Fujita was the actor in the original commemorated event, but instead of remaining in the seemingly frozen past, he reshaped the memory of his seminal event by creating significant subevents. His historic visits injected into the memory of the bombing a message of peace and environmentalism far removed from its origins and thus created maelstroms of memory in the minds of Brookings residents. Fujita did not try to rewrite the actual events of September 9, 1942; instead, he continually laid the groundwork for future commemoration and kept his story open-ended.

Secondary factors other than the intentional memory-work of the Jaycees, Webber, and Fujita underpinned the reinvented meaning of the Mount Emily bombing. The Cold War fostered amity between the United States and Japan. Veterans groups lost potency in the community with every passing year, and multicultural attitudes reappeared in postwar America. Brookings received a large influx of population in the 1970s and 1980s, and perhaps these newcomers, searching for what was unique about Brookings and without memories of nervous war years spent on the coast, more enthusiastically adopted the bomb story than those who lived there in 1942.[79] The uniqueness of Fujita's bombing in American history, and the fascinating place it holds in the history of military technology, surely facilitated commemoration. Most important, one must acknowledge the relevance of the very smallness of the event. Southern Oregon commemorates Fujita's bombing because it was a rather odd one: it killed or wounded no one and inflicted negligible damage. The veterans who wrote to the *Pilot* in 1962 were correct: had Fujita's mission been a success, the community surely would not have lionized him, or turned his airplane into a sandwich.

The friendship between Fujita and Brookings required mutual forgetting. The town neatly fitted Fujita's failed mission into the American "Good War" narrative of World War II and subtlety demanded the pilot's atonement. The symbolic tree and the storyboard at the bombsite, moreover, provide a tale of rapprochement that safely excludes parts of the larger World War II experience (Pearl Harbor, the atomic bombings) that might

79. The population of the town and surrounding area has indeed grown dramatically in every decade since the bombing except the 1960s (when Fujita died, Brookings had 5,400 residents). A detailed analysis of how length of residence in Brookings and generational membership affected attitudes toward the bombing is outside of this essay's scope. Still, I believe that the phenomenon in which newcomers to an area are more interested in promoting local history than long-term residents is merely incidental to the surge of interest in the bombing. The consensual apathy in Brookings toward the bombing in the 1970s and the consensual embrace of it since the 1980s, and the overall primacy of Fujita, discourage reliance on the newcomer explanation. I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for bringing this question to my attention.

turn the sacred space into a hybrid space.[80] But the presence of an incomplete and decontextualized narrative does not make the desires for peace any less real or detract from the benefits of trans-Pacific friendship. Every site of commemoration is inevitably contested, but not every one can be a public-historian-managed zone of competing interpretations. And perhaps some should not be.[81]

The bombing will likely resonate in Brookings for a long time to come. A group of Fujita's contemporaries from the Japanese navy recently demonstrated the story's allure when they paid homage to the bombsite.[82] Children will be reminded of Fujita's message in the library whenever they open certain books or glance at his sword, and the Forest Service will direct tourists to the bombsite trail. There has even been some talk of a bombing-related museum, the design of which would surely gauge the relative strength of the promotive, military-history, multicultural, and environmental elements of the bomb story. Yet to be determined is whether all of this commemorative activity will become an end in itself or will foster increased learning about World War II and the virtues of cultural internationalism. With or without a museum, new outside voices and shifting cultural exigencies will undoubtedly reconstitute the memory of Fujita's bombing once again.

80. For a discussion of the notions of sacred and hybrid space, see Chidester and Linenthal, eds., *American Sacred Space*, especially 16–20.

81. For a discussion of proposals to offer competing narratives at historic sites, see Levinson, *Written in Stone*, 128–29.

82. *The Register Guard*, 11 October 1998.