

Memories of Photographer Joe O'Donnell



Joe O'Donnell, the man who took this photo at Nagasaki, was sent by the U.S. military to document the damage inflicted on the Japanese homeland caused by air raids of fire bombs and atomic bombs. He travelled across Western Japan chronicling the devastation, documenting the dead, the wounded, the homeless and orphaned. Images of the human suffering were etched both on his negatives and his heart.

In the photo, the boy stands erect, having done his duty by bringing his dead brother to a cremation ground. Standing at attention shows an obvious military influence.

Joe O'Donnell spoke to a Japanese interviewer about this picture:

"I saw a boy about ten years old walking by. He was carrying a baby on his back. In those days in Japan, we often saw children playing with their little brothers or sisters on their backs, but this boy was clearly different. I could see that he had come to this place for a serious reason. He was wearing no shoes. His face was hard. The little head was tipped back as if the baby were fast asleep. The boy stood there for five or ten minutes."

"The men in white masks walked over to him and quietly began to take off the rope that was holding the baby. That is when I saw that the baby was already dead. The men held the body by the hands and feet and placed it on the fire. The boy stood there straight without moving, watching the flames. He was biting his lower lip so hard that it shone with blood. The flame burned low like the sun going down. The boy turned around and walked silently away."

Source: Rare Historical Photos

<http://rarehistoricalphotos.com/japanese-boy-standing-attention-brought-dead-younger-brother-cremation-pyre-1945/>