

Never lose your cool

The sixth instalment on the pioneer of Japan's co-operative movement talks of dealing with the military at the end of World War II

By the end of 1944, the Japanese army was suffering great defeats in the South Pacific, but the military government controlled the media and did not allow the public to hear any such information. The army, in their desperation, made certain absurd demands, and I would here like to relate how I responded to such demands.

A certain operation official—whom I will call K and who was with the Akatsuki Regiment stationed in Otaru—paid me a visit and requested that we co-operate in the defense of northern Japan against possible invasion. He informed me that in order to perform the defense operation, they needed fuel for cargo ships, but that the army had a severe shortage of oil. They had planned to use herring oil instead, and asked me if we would send them fishing boats to catch herring.

Herring oil was obtained from herring which migrated through the Sea of Okhotsk. I was sure that we would not be able to produce enough oil to support a military operation. I rejected his request, telling him that our primary responsibility was to fulfil the production quota for food for the citizens. He became angry and left.

A few days later, the chief of the Hokkaido government's Fishery Department informed me that we had to send 200 boats and their crews, which were fishing for mackerel around Matsumae near Hakodate, to the Sea of Okhotsk, where they were to be used to catch herring. The official implied that the military would force the government to replace me if I didn't agree.

Since nobody was in any position to disobey an order from the army at that time, we were obliged to obey this order. I tried to resist as long as I could, so that

the fishermen would suffer as little as possible. For instance, when I negotiated with the Akatsuki Regiment regarding this matter, I persuaded K to accept two conditions. The first was that the regiment would supply the fuel for the trip from Matsumae to the Sea of Okhotsk and back, and the second was that they must compensate the fishermen for the lost catches of mackerel, based on the average catch. K approved the requests and we concluded a formal agreement.

Two hundred fishing boats then gathered in the Sea of Okhotsk. I suggested that a trial operation be carried out first with only 20 boats, since we would, therefore, be able to conserve fuel and determine the potential amount to be harvested. The results were very unpromising, as only a small amount of herring was caught.

Soon after the operation began, World War II came to an end, on 15 August 1945. The Akatsuki Regiment's operation turned out to be a pointless venture, and the fishermen came back home. I was concerned about how to compensate them, so I went to Otaru, accompanied by an official of the Hokkaido government, to meet the leader of the regiment. To my surprise, however, the Akatsuki commander claimed to know nothing of the contract between us, and he flatly rejected our claim.

Large-scale operation

I responded that, as commander, he must surely have known about the operation, particularly since it has been such a large-scale operation and since K had been sent directly to us. The commander, who seemed to be shocked by Japan's defeat, rattled his sword and once again denied any knowledge of the operation. He then asked who was responsible for Japan's defeat, and answered his own question by

asserting that we, the civilian leaders, were responsible because we had not co-operated.

He then stopped and asked the absurd question, “Do you have any calluses on your hands?” He implied that civilians had not fought bravely for the good of the nation. I was rather unnerved by his rattling of his sword, but he did not seem to be an ill-natured man. I calmly replied that I had no calluses, since my job involved holding a pen, not a sword.

He regained his composure and asked what had happened with the operation. I explained about the contract documents I had made with K of the operation staff, and told him how K had not sent them back to me.

The commander called a lieutenant and asked him who had made the contract. The lieutenant replied that K had, but that he had torn it up when the war ended. The commander became furious, as did another official, a colonel who had come into the room and heard the story.

The latter said he wanted to kill K and end his own life by committing *seppuki*. (Many military leaders, who came from the samurai class, felt responsible for Japan’s defeat, and, therefore, committed suicide by *seppuki* after the war. *seppuki* involves ritual disembowelment, and this practice

was originally carried out by samurai who had dishonoured their superiors.)

I came to understand that the commander truly had not known about the contract, due to a communications breakdown, but that was not our business. As I was afraid that our claim would be passed on to be handled by the army, I requested the commander that at least five million yen be paid to the 200 fishermen of Matsumae to settle this affair in a businesslike manner.

The commander then reprimanded the colonel by telling him that there was no point in crying over spilt milk. He said he would honour the claim for five million yen, but that they had no money at that time. He suggested we take payment in the form of goods, such as fishing nets and rope, instead of cash. I was surprised to hear that they had secret supplies of such goods stored in warehouses.

Cash payment

I asked about the value of this gear, and found that it was six times as expensive as the regular prices. We would receive only a limited amount of gear to cover our losses, so I insisted on cash. The commander finally told me to wait for a few days, while he tried to get the money from the Hokkaido headquarters of the army. When I returned to his office a few days later, I was told that he had obtained the money. I thanked him for his efforts,

and went to Matsumae, where I began distributing it. Some of the fishermen claimed at first that the amount was too small, but they understood after I told them about the negotiations I had to go through in order to get the money.

That was over 30 years ago, but I can still vividly remember the commander. He was quite arrogant on the surface, but, at heart, he was an honest person. If I had not negotiated bravely, the Matsumae fishermen would not have received the money, and they would have suffered through extremely hard times after the war.

As a point of interest, I'd like to note that the Akatsuki Regiment did not consist of battle troops. It was in charge of procuring goods which the army needed. They had numerous warehouses in Sapporo stocked with goods such as clothes and shoes. In the post-war confusion, some soldiers took advantage of the lack of discipline and began to sell these goods on the black market. There were many rumours about such activity, but nobody made any accusations, as everyone was frightened of the army.

I, therefore, went to see Hokkaido Governor Kato and advised him to look into this matter. I told him that these goods, which were purchased with tax money, did not belong to the Akatsuki Regiment anymore, since the war was over. With the severe shortages of food, clothing, and other goods, I told him, the soldiers should not be allowed to engage in such illegal behaviour. I suggested that the Hokkaido government take control of these provisions.

I also told him that, in certain regions, army officials had been selling trucks and keeping the money for themselves. I recommended that the government distribute these trucks to the agricultural and fisheries organizations, as they would then be of great help to ensure a stable supply of food for the people.

At that time, Governor Kato was not the head of the Hokkaido government, since the military government had placed a president in power over him during the war. Nevertheless, the governor reacted

quickly by proposing to the Prefectural Assembly that these goods be placed under civilian control. This policy had a great effect in preventing chaos from breaking out. In particular, ten regional branches of Dogyoren received trucks, greatly facilitating the distribution of food.

I hope it does not appear as if I am boasting. I simply hope to make clear that we must never lose our cool, and that, if we are brave, we will be sure to find strong supporters who will co-operate with us. 3

This is excerpted from the *Autobiography of Takatoshi Ando*, translated by Naoyuki Tao and James Colyn