

# **Disaster Relief Operations by the Imperial Japanese Navy and the US Navy in the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake**

**: Focusing on the activities of the on-site commanders of the Imperial Japanese Navy and the US Navy**

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## **Foreword**

The Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 caused a series of tsunamis beyond our imagination and the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, resulting in damage of an unprecedented scale. We have received numerous aid and support from other countries. In particular, the assistance provided by the US Navy in Japan is incomparable to that provided by other countries in terms of the response in its initial actions and scale. How have the Imperial Japanese Navy and the US Navy cooperated during past disasters in Japan? In this paper, I will examine the relief operations by the Imperial Japanese Navy in the Taisho Kanto Quake and subsequent damages that occurred about 90 years ago (hereinafter collectively referred to as the “1923 Great Kanto Earthquake”) and those of the US Asiatic Fleet whose base was in Qingdao, China, during the Qing Dynasty in the initial 2 weeks shortly after the occurrence of the earthquake.

## **1 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake**

### **(1) Overview**

At about 10:00 a.m. on September 1st, 1923, there was a weak low-pressure system in the Kanto area and the area was experiencing strong wind and heavy rain. The rain stopped falling before long and the wind direction changed to the south. At 11:58 a.m., when people were preparing for lunch at home or in factories, a large earthquake hit the entire Kanto area. The

epicenter was north of Sagami Bay and the magnitude was 7.9.<sup>1</sup> The number of aftershocks felt in Tokyo Prefecture was 237 times by the afternoon on September 2nd and 721 by the end of September.<sup>2</sup> Particularly, in densely populated areas like Tokyo, Yokohama, Yokosuka, etc., the public transportation and means of communication were interrupted due to the severity of the earthquake and at the same time, houses collapsed and fires broke out in many places. Millions of people were buried under collapsed houses and caught in fires, and had no idea where to go in order to escape from the fires. In addition, food and drinking water started to become scarce and the public security situation worsened over time due to robbery and acts of violence. As a result, the death toll rose to 91,344 and the number of missing persons totaled 13,275 in 7 prefectures (Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama, Yamanashi, Shizuoka, Ibaraki (total population: about 10.72 million)).<sup>3</sup>

## **(2) Situation of damage**

### **a) Yokohama and Yokosuka**

One might think that Tokyo suffered the worst damage in the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake. However, as the epicenter was located on the north-west tip of the deepest part of the Sagami Bay trench, the damage caused by the earthquake was much more serious in Kanagawa Prefecture than in Tokyo Prefecture<sup>4</sup> as we can see in the morning edition of Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun on September 3rd. It states that “Yokohama was completely destroyed, the casualty toll has reached tens of thousands” and “Yokosuka was also completely destroyed. There are piles of dead and injured everywhere.” Almost all deaths in Tokyo Prefecture were the result of secondary damage caused by fires, while almost all deaths in Kanagawa Prefecture were the result of the earthquake and tsunamis. The

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<sup>1</sup> Technova Disaster Research Project, “Disasters in Modern Japan: Natural Disasters in the Meiji, Taisho and Showa Era,” Technova Inc, 1993, p.52.

<sup>2</sup> Yokoyama Masaaki, Kanto-Daishinsai: Sonotoki Nishi-Sagami ha (Great Kanto Earthquake: What Happened in West Sagami?), Matsukazeshobou, 1996, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> Tokyo Municipal Office, *Tokyo Shinsai-Roku: Zenshu* (Tokyo Disaster History: Part D), Tokyo Municipal Office ed., 1925, p.45.

<sup>4</sup> Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun, morning edition on September 3, 1923, pp.1-3.

worst-affected cities in Kanagawa Prefecture were Yokohama and Yokosuka.

Kouzo Suzukida, commanding officer of the destroyer *Hagi*<sup>5</sup> that arrived in the port of Yokohama at 11 a.m. on September 2nd, reported the situation in Yokohama to the Minister of the Navy on the situation as he himself saw it, reports from the Yokohama Harbor Office director, and officers dispatched to inspect the situation from the destroyer were also relayed back to the Minister of the Navy, Commander in Chief of Yokosuka Naval Station and Commander of Destroyer Flotilla 15.

*“The severe earthquake destroyed the breakwaters and the Customs Office. Houses in the entire city were destroyed or submerged, and explosions were occurring in many places. The entire city has been turned into a sea of fire. The people had intended to head uptown, but they were obstructed by fires. We do not know how many people are dead or injured. Although some of them were fortunately able to get to the coast and were rescued by Japanese and foreign commercial ships in the port, there were insufficient ships. Heavy oil was burning and flowing on the sea surface. A number of people were killed by drowning and fire.”<sup>6</sup>*

On the other hand, as the urban area of Yokosuka City was developed by clearing mountainous areas, the collapse of cliffs by the severe earthquake occurred in many places, burying roads and houses in the process. As a result, a number of men and livestock were killed or injured.<sup>7</sup> *Kanagawa-ken Shinsai-shi* (The Disaster History of Kanagawa Prefecture) explains that all 14,300 houses collapsed or were submerged. No house

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<sup>5</sup> Originally, Imperial Japanese warship entitles HIJMS (His Imperial Japanese Majesty's Ship). However, omit entitles on this paper due to the complicatedness, and write only italics.

<sup>6</sup> Navy Department ed., *Koubun-Biko Hensai Saigai Fuzoku*, Vol.4, stored in the National Institute for Defense Studies' Library archive (0125). Although official documents do not include page numbers, they include reference numbers for microfilms. Therefore, the reference numbers were described in bracket. The same shall apply hereinafter.

<sup>7</sup> Yokosuka City ed., *Yokosuka-Shishi Shisei Shiko 80-nen (jou)* (Yokosuka City History: 80 Years of Municipality (Vol.1)), Yokosuka City, 1988, p.402.

remained in its original condition. The entire city was destroyed and the death toll was 684 and the number of injured was 897.<sup>8</sup> In the hilly urban area, massive landslides occurred which accompanied by unusual noise from the ground and clouds of dust rose in many places when the severe earthquake hit.<sup>9</sup> Fires that occurred in the city were flamed by the strong winds and spread rapidly. 80,000 tons of heavy oil belonging to the Navy leaked from oil tanks in the Hakozaki area and into the Yokosuka port and caught fire. Military vessels in harbor were able to escape, but the leaked heavy oil continued to burn for 4 hours and heavy oil tanks continued to blow black smoke for 10 days.<sup>10</sup> *Yokosuka-shi Shinsai-Shi* (the Yokosuka City Disaster History) describes the situation in the city immediately after the earthquake as follows.

*Immediately after the earthquake, not only the central urban area but also all the areas in the city turned to dust. Houses in other areas collapsed or leaned. There is no house that still maintains its original condition. Moreover, strong aftershocks occurred several times per hour and shook half-destroyed houses. This caused tremendous fear on people and made it impossible to remain in the destroyed houses. Therefore, people evacuate not only to temples and shrines but also to hills, forests, school grounds, parade grounds and other safe places. Those places are filled with people. They are concerned about receiving immediate help and not able to think about the future. They are shocked and do not know what to do.*<sup>11</sup>

Asakichi Yasukouchi, a governor of Kanagawa Prefecture then, reported the devastated state of the city to Shinpei Goto, Minister of Home Affairs then, as follows.

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<sup>8</sup> Kanagawa Prefecture ed., *Kanagawa-ken Shinsai-Shi: Kanagawa-ken Shinsai-Shi Furoku-tsuki* (Kanagawa Prefectural Disaster History: Kanagawa Prefectural Disaster History Supplement), Kanagawa Prefecture, p.513.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Kanagawa Prefectural Police Department ed., *Taisho Daishin-Kasai-Shi* (Taisho Quake Fire Record), Kanagawa Prefectural Police Department, 1925, p.513.

<sup>11</sup> Kanagawa Prefecture ed., *ibid.*, p.513.

*In Yokosuka City, only 150 houses were saved from the damage among the total of 11,800 houses. However, those houses either collapsed or half-collapsed. About 4,000 houses were burnt to the ground by fires in four different places when the earthquake occurred. The number of dead bodies found by September 4th was about 450, and more and more dead bodies are being found. The situation is so devastating that I cannot explain it with words. In an instant all hell broke loose in the area. Moreover, the Naval Hospital, the Naval Engineering College, Naval Barracks, the Yokosuka post office and others were also burnt to the ground. It is not an exaggeration to say that the naval port in Yokosuka City was completely destroyed.<sup>12</sup>*

Although soldiers began to congregate and participate in rescue activities about one hour after the earthquake due to the characteristics of the city, water was not available because fire hydrant in the entire city were destroyed. The fire-fighting activities had to depend on firebreaks.<sup>13</sup>

#### **b) Tsunami**

The tsunami reached 6-meters high at the Miura Peninsula cape, which does not face Sagami Bay directly and 8-meters high at Suzaki.<sup>14</sup> Though a tsunami warning was issued in the evening of September 1st, only a small tsunami arrived at urban Kamakura (77 houses submerged) and no tsunami was observed around the Miura Peninsula.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, a series of tsunamis hit Atami and Ito, which face Sagami Bay, after the earthquake. An approximately 13-meters high tsunami hit Atami twice and washed away about 150 houses on the coast. A number of the dead bodies of those who were washed away by the tsunamis were washed ashore on September 2nd, and it was a devastating scene. Ito was also hit by an

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<sup>12</sup> Yokosuka City Disaster History Publication Society, *Yokosuka-shi Shinsai-Shi-tsuki Fukko-Shi* (Yokosuka City Disaster History Supplement: Reconstruction History), Yokosuka Nichinichi Shimbun, 1983, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Kanagawa Prefecture ed., *ibid.*, p.514.

<sup>14</sup> Technova Disaster Research Project, *ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>15</sup> Yokosuka City History Editing Committee ed., *Yokosuka-Shishi* (Yokosuka City History), Yokosuka City, 1957, p.574.

11-meters high tsunami and about 50 houses on the coast were washed away. Kamakura's seashore was hit by a nearly 10-meters high tsunami, and about 100 people who were on the Yuigahama beach and about 50 people who were crossing the Enoshima bridge went missing.<sup>16</sup>

**c) Railway**

The destruction of railway tracks caused by the great earthquake was also devastating. 24 trains met a mishap and some train cars were buried in tunnels or fell from cliffs into the ocean. The damage to the Tokaido line that runs alongside Sagami Bay near the epicenter was particularly tremendous, and a number of locomotives and passenger carriages were totally tipped over on their side. Railway tracks of the Tokaido line were cut in many places, and the section from Shinagawa to Gotenba was completely disconnected. In addition, as a railroad bridge between Chigasaki and Hiratsuka had collapsed, there was no hope for reopening the line. Therefore, the transportation of relief supplies into Tokyo and Yokohama, and the evacuation of the afflicted people from Kanto to Kansai had to depend solely on marine transportation. In order to assist the marine transportation, warships and ferries belonging to the Ministry of Railways were used for transporting the affected people to the Shimizu port from September 7th.

## **2 Initial action and damage of the Imperial Japanese Navy**

I will now examine the initial actions taken by the Imperial Japanese Navy. *Taisho-Daishin-Kasai-Shi* (The Taisho Great Quake Fire Record) describes the initial actions of the Imperial Japanese Navy after the earthquake as follows.

*As soon as the earthquake occurred, realizing the extent of the*

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Social Affairs, *Shashin to Chizu to Kiroku de Miru Kanto-Daishinsai-Shi: Kanagawa-Hen* (History of the Great Kanto Earthquake Viewed with Photos and Maps: Kanagawa Version), Senshusha, 1988, p.468.

*damage, the Imperial Japanese Navy ordered all its organizations to respond immediately for the purpose of providing rescue. The mighty fleet was the first to transport food and other relief supplies.<sup>17</sup>*

On the one hand, the following situations with regard to the initial action and damage sustained by land based forces of the Navy arose in Tokyo and Yokosuka. In the Tokyo area, at the time when the earthquake occurred, all telegraphic and telephone communications were completely lost and the same situation occurred with communications among the Navy Department, the Naval General Staff, the receiving stations and the Ministry of Communications and Transportation. As for the Navy, only the Naval Funabashi Transmitting Station miraculously kept operating its functions intact. This Transmitting Station was under the control of the Naval Tokyo Wireless Telegraph Station for transmitting telegrams issued by the central naval departments such as the Navy Department of Japan and the Naval General Staff. As wireless communications between Funabashi Transmitting Station and Tokyo were lost, the commanding officer (Lieutenant Omori) decided at his discretion to operate it as an independent communications station where both transmitting and receiving functions were available. Although Lieutenant Omori had not grasped the extent of the damage caused by the earthquake, he could see catastrophic fires in the directions of Tokyo and Yokohama in the distance, so he sent at his discretion the following telegraphic message to the entire Navy at 3:00 p.m. on September 1st.

*A rainstorm has hit Tokyo today and strong earthquakes have occurred continuously since the afternoon. Catastrophic fires are fiercely burning in Yokohama.<sup>18</sup>*

This was the first telegram message sent regarding the 1923 Great

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<sup>17</sup> Kanagawa Prefectural Police Department ed., *ibid.*, pp.801-802.

<sup>18</sup> Navy Department ed., *Koubun-Biko Hensai-Saigai 4* (Official Document Remarks: Disaster 4), Vol. 156 (1445).

Kanto Earthquake and it was transmitted to all the naval forces after the earthquake occurred. Then, after compiling the victims' information and telegrams on the status of damage were transmitted in successively at his discretion.<sup>19</sup> The contents of those five telegrams are as follows.<sup>20</sup>

Number <sup>1</sup>	Date & Time Group	Content
Funabashi 1)	011905	Communications between Tokyo and Funabashi have been lost from this afternoon due to the severe earthquake that hit Tokyo. I send this telegram just in case.
Funabashi 2)	011910	Communications between the receiving and transmitting stations have been lost. We are investigating the situation. The damage in Yokosuka and Tokyo is devastating but we do not know about other areas.
Funabashi 3)	012313	...According to what I have heard, fires broke out in about twenty places in Tokyo and are still burning fiercely. (Snip). Yokohama was also destroyed completely. Earthquakes occur from time to time. Although we have called the receiving station many times after the disaster, there is no response. Wireless communications have also been lost so I dispatched hands to investigate the situation.
Funabashi 4)	020725	...Although the status of damage is unknown, according to evacuees, many houses had collapsed and fires broke out in many places after the first earthquake. 1. There are numerous dead bodies in the Fukagawa and Senjyu areas which were completely burnt to the ground. 2. Fires broke out in the Mitsukoshi department store and extended to Imperial Palace. The Metropolitan Police Department and the Teikoku Gekijyo (Imperial Garden theater) were completely burnt to the ground. 3. There is no response from the Navy Department. We assume that it has also been damaged.

<sup>19</sup> The author put the number for an explanatory reason (the same shall apply hereinafter).

<sup>20</sup> Navy Department ed., *ibid.*, Vol. 156 (1479-1489).

		<p>4. Fires are burning fiercely from Senjyu to Shinagawa, and explosion occurs in many places. The raging fire can be viewed from this station.</p> <p>5. We are feared of earthquakes that have been occurring continuously up till now.</p> <p>6. According to interception, Yokohama and Nagoya have almost been completely destroyed.</p> <p>7. Railway bridges fell in many places and the transportation system has been stopped.</p>
Funabashi 5)	021100	<p>Although we received a telegram to Tokyo, there is no hope of transmitting it to the recipient. Therefore, I am thinking better to send it by an official messenger from Shinagawa not from Yokosuka. By this morning, telegrams were carried by official messengers but their whereabouts are unknown.</p>

Moreover, couriers carrying telegrams that the station had received were dispatched twice to the Navy Department in order to establish contact between the Navy Department and the Funabashi Transmitting Station. However, as those couriers did not return to the station, an experienced expert sailor was selected on September 2nd and was dispatched as courier for the third time by bicycle. This third courier returned from the Navy Department at 2:25 p.m. on the same day with important unsent telegram messages.<sup>21</sup> The commanding officer of the Funabashi Transmitting Station made a decision at that time that these telegrams must be sent as soon as possible, because the damage to Tokyo was so devastating, based on their content. Therefore, those telegrams were transmitted continuously as emergency transmissions from 3:00 p.m. to about 7:00 p.m.<sup>22</sup> Those three telegrams (Navy Department 1 to Navy Department 3) are described in the next chapter and they were the first information on the status of damage transmitted from the central command of the Navy to the entire Navy after

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<sup>21</sup> The first and second official messengers dispatched immediately after the disaster returned carrying important telegrams from the Ministry of the Navy same as September 2nd.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 156 (1448).

the severe earthquake. At that time, the decision of Lieutenant Omori, the commanding officer of the Funabashi Transmitting Station, to transmit those telegrams is recorded as follows.

*(Omitted) The first and second couriers have returned with a number of emergency transmissions to different addresses. I feel that I have an important mission of sending those emergency telegrams as soon as possible. (Snip) They were transmitted continuously from 3:00 p.m. to 7:07 p.m. (Snip).<sup>23</sup>*

At the docks of the Yokosuka Naval Dockyard, Submarines number 10 and number 14 were under construction in dry dock. However, supports came off the submarines due to the earthquake and they were thrown into the stone floor from the slips and destroyed. The aircraft carrier *Amagi*<sup>24</sup> was also destroyed.<sup>25</sup> Within the port, *Mikasa*, a flagship of the Battle of Tsushima, was anchored, but a part of its bottom ran around on a reef. As a result, holes were made in the hull and water started to flow into the ship. In order to avoid capsizing, it was tugged to the coast of the Naval Engineering College outside the port and anchored on the rocky ground in shallow water.<sup>26</sup> *The Taisho Great Quake Fire Record* describes the damage and initial action of the Yokosuka Naval Station as follows.

*The building of the Headquarters of the Naval Station collapsed due to the earthquake and officials were unable to work there and had to evacuate. The headquarters was relocated to the front of the Naval Station building. The damage to the Yokosuka area was devastating.*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Although the original plan was to construct a 41,200-ton battleship, it was cancelled due to the effect of disarmament; the vessel was decided to be modified as aircraft carrier in 1923. The construction was restarted, but it did not complete so that the vessel was mothballed.

<sup>25</sup> Kanagawa Prefecture ed., *Kanagawa-ken-Shi Shiryō-Hen 11: Kindai-Gendai 1* (Kanagawa Prefectural History Material 11: Modern Period and Today (1)), Kanagawa Prefecture, 1975, p.86.

<sup>26</sup> Kotaro, Tanaka and Tatsuzo, Takayama, *Nihon Shinsai-Shi* (Japanese Disaster History), Ariakeshobou, 1993, pp.58-59.

*Various naval organizations and a number of houses in the city collapsed or were submerged. Moreover, as fires broke out in many places after the earthquake, the assigned fleet forces received orders to organize fire-fighting teams immediately and participate in fire-fighting activities for various official buildings and in the urban area. Wired and wireless communications and the public transportation system had been heavily damaged and the status of other areas was unknown at that time. We could see black smoke in the sky in the direction of Tokyo and Yokohama. We couldn't imagine the extent of the damage.<sup>27</sup>*

The specific damage to major facilities under the control of Yokosuka Naval Station is as described in the following table.<sup>28</sup> As the Headquarters of Naval Station was located in Yokosuka, there were many fortified zones and a lot of the information was kept secret. Therefore, the status of damage had not been made known publicly.

**Status of damage of major facilities related to the Yokosuka Naval Station**

Name of facility	Number of casualties	Building
HQ of Naval Station	1 person was crushed to death, several minor and serious injuries	(Brick) office building was severely damaged and brick buildings were completely destroyed and all wood buildings were sloped or partially destroyed. About half of them have a chance to be reconstructed. It is impossible to continue working.
Naval Station Library	1 death, several minor and serious injuries	Most parts of the building collapsed or were damaged. The building is out of service.
Wireless Transmitting Station	1 minor injury	One toilet room was completely destroyed. One sending and transmitting machine room was partially destroyed. The electric motor room and electric detector room leaned and their ceiling was damaged.

<sup>27</sup> Kanagawa Prefectural Police ed., *ibid.*, p.802.

<sup>28</sup> Navy Department ed., *Koubun-Bikou Hensai-Saigai Fuzoku*, Vol.4, summary of Yoko-Chinsai-Nippo No.1.

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		Eighteen oil condensers for transmitters (1910 model) are out of service.
Meteorological Weather Station		Observatory room: There are big cracks in the sidewall and the ceiling was seriously damaged. Office room: The ceiling was seriously damaged. Wind meter stand: Sloping due to ground subsidence. Machinery and apparatus: Primordial mercurial barometer and accessories of camera were completely destroyed.
Naval Dockyard	40 instant deaths, 44 serious injuries, 12 minor injuries	Brick and wood buildings outside the office building collapsed or were seriously damaged except for a few buildings. Steel-reinforced concrete buildings suffered less damaged.
Naval Gunnery School	3 serious injuries, about 10 minor injuries	Two buildings collapsed. The office building and barracks were damaged but may be used after repair.
Torpedo School		The office building, barracks and auditorium were seriously damaged but may be used after repair.
Naval Engineering College	2 deaths, a few minor injuries	Completely burnt outside the canning factory (steel structure).
Naval Barracks	1 death, 1 minor injury	Partially burnt, the office building and barracks were severely damaged. The engine factory (steel structure) was partially destroyed.
Naval Hospital	1 death, 1 serious injury	Completely burnt.
Naval Flying Corps		Most aircrafts were damaged. The office building, barracks and hangers were severely damaged but it is possible to repair them.
Warships in Docks		Submarines and Amagi (under construction) were overturned.
Hakozaki heavy oil tanks		There are cracks, heavy oil leak and more than 80% of the stock has vanished in smoke.

### 3 Rescue operations and security patrol by the Imperial Japanese Navy

#### (1) Overview

The Imperial Japanese Navy started full-blown rescue operations mainly from the sea within a few days of the occurrence of the earthquake. *The Taisho Quake Fire Record* describes this situation as follows.

*It did not pass long before relief supplies were accumulated in Tokyo and top of the Yokohama bay head. This significantly contributed to the stabilization of public and maintained order. A few months have passed after that, during which the officer and men have all suffered but were dedicated to various efforts with their full strength. This gives all of us hope.<sup>29</sup>*

The order for mobilization was issued to almost all major available warships from among the warships belonging to the Combined Fleet and the three Naval Stations (Yokosuka, Kure, Sasebo) except those dispatched to other countries at that time. The number of major naval ships totaled 150 (about 30,000 hands) including 45 warships and 63 destroyers.<sup>30</sup> Those naval ships participated in such duties as the transportation of food, relief goods and evacuees, guard duties, investigation and surveying of afflicted areas, and the total number of transported evacuees totaled 59,000.<sup>31</sup> The recovery operations were completed by November 6th, about 2 months after the occurrence of the earthquake.<sup>32</sup>

#### (2) Response of each force

The Navy Department established the Naval Disaster Relief Committee in

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<sup>29</sup> Kanagawa Prefectural Police ed., *ibid.*, pp.801-802.

<sup>30</sup> Goro, Kezuka, *Kanto Daishinsai to Miura Hanto* (Great Kanto Earthquake and Miura Peninsula), Goro Kzuka, p.70.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Yokosuka City ed., *ibid.*, p.409.

the Ministry on September 3rd in order to implement relief measures in collaboration with the Extraordinary Disaster Relief Secretariat of the Cabinet. Among unsent telegrams carried by officials who returned to Funabashi Transmitting Station after 3:00 p.m. on September 2nd<sup>33</sup>, the following are the telegrams related to the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake transmitted to the naval forces through the Funabashi Transmitting Station from the Vice-Minister of Navy.

**Telegrams related to the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake  
transmitted through the Funabashi Transmitting Station**

Number: Navy Department 1)	From: Vice-Minister of Navy	To: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet
<i>At noon on September 1st, a severe earthquake hit the Tokyo area. Although we do not know the degree of damage, many people were injured or killed. Huge fires have occurred in many places and burnt the majority of the city. Fires are still spreading. Communications have been lost inside and outside the city and martial law has been issued. This telegram is to order you to stop the cruise of your Fleet and take measures for assigning them to the three ports (Yokosuka, Osaka, Kure) for such duties as rescue and transportation. I will send you another telegram with more detail. This is an order from the Ministry.</i>		

Number: Navy Department 2)	From: Vice-Minister of Navy	To: Commander in Chief of each Naval Station , Commander in Chief of each Major Naval Port
<i>All vessels that are schedule to leave for overseas are ordered to cancel their schedule and to take measures for participating in such duties as rescue and transportation in the Tokyo area.</i>		

Number: Navy Department 3)	From: Vice-Minister of Navy	To: Commander in Chief of the Yokosuka Naval Station
<i>It is hard to explain the devastating situation of the afflicted people in Yokohama. The situation is worsening and it seems that the police do not exist. Therefore, I issue an order to take measures for immediately sending a</i>		

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Hensai-Saigai 2, Vol.154 (1100, 1107, 1114).

*heavily-armed force under the direction of you, Naval Engineering College and a captain of each force to Yokohama and to take care of the maintenance of security. The Army is planning to dispatch about 70 mounted soldiers tonight and 150 police officers of the Metropolitan Police tomorrow morning by a communication vessel. The authority of direction of the Army and the Navy is acknowledged and we shall comply with the order of precedence.*

The status of damage caused by this great earthquake written in those telegrams has been summarized by only time, but their text makes us feel the sense of despair. In particular, Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet was ordered to cancel the future cruise (Navy Department 1)) and Commander in Chief of each Naval Station and each key port's commander were ordered to cancel the action of vessels that were scheduled to leave for overseas (Navy Department 2)) by the Vice-Minister of Navy. This indicated that the Navy Department was ready to commence the relief operations with all naval forces and regarded this situation as an emergency. Moreover, a ground security force was formed and ordered to be dispatched in order to maintain the security of the city of Yokohama. It was also encouraged to have army soldiers familiarize themselves with the order of precedence with regard to the authority of direction (Navy Department 3)). In those days, it seemed that there was no specific agreement on the direction in cases where the Army and the Navy cooperated in a disaster field in those days.

Although the Combined Fleet (Commander in chief of Combined Fleet, Vice Admiral Isamu Takeshita) was implementing routine inspection in the Lichangshan harbor in the seas around Lushun on September 1st, he received all five emergency transmissions (Funabashi 1)-(Funabashi 5) )transmitted after 3:00 p.m. on the same day by the commanding officer of the Funabashi Transmitting Station. This helped the Fleet to know the situation about the great earthquake in the Tokyo and Yokohama area and to understand the necessity of swiftly returning to Japan. At 2:00 p.m. on September 2nd, the Commander in Chief of Combined Fleet issued an emergency order to prepare for getting underway to all assigned forces. Each Fleet weighed anchor for Japan successively from about 4:00 p.m. Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet who received the first telegram

transmitted by the Navy Department (Navy Department 1)) at 4:45 p.m. on September 2nd on the way back to Japan rewire with regard to the intentions of Fleet's actions as follows.<sup>34</sup>

From: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: Vice-Minister of Navy, Commander in Chief of each Naval Station
<p><i>The Fleet leaves on September 2nd and is deployed as follows.</i>  <i>Yokosuka: "Nagato", "Kongo", "Wakamiya", Third Squadron, Second Torpedo Flotilla Division</i>  <i>Osaka: "Mutsu", "Hiei", "Kirishima", Fifth Squadron</i>  <i>Kure: "Ise", "Hyuga", First Torpedo Flotilla Division</i>  <i>Other vessels are ordered to wait in Sasebo for the time being. "Mutsu", "Hiei" and "Kirishima" will be sent to Yokosuka as soon as they arrive at Osaka. "Nagato" is expected to arrive in the morning of September 5th.</i></p>	

The flagship *Nagato* went directly to Tokyo area and arrived off the coast of Shinagawa at 4:20 p.m. on September 5th and Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet received the instruction on disaster relief duties from the Minister of Navy at 7:00 p.m. on the same day.<sup>35</sup> At this point, the Combined Fleet and officially received their assignments and it started to give their assigned forces those assignments. The organization of the Combined Fleet in those days was as follows.

**Organization of the Combined Fleet  
during the period of the Great Kanto Earthquake**

*First Fleet*

*First Squadron (Nagato, Mutsu, Hyuga, Ise (reorganized to Third Squadron from September 3rd)*

*Third Squadron (Kuma, Tama, Ooi)*

*First Torpedo Flotilla Division (Tatsuta, 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Divisions)*

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<sup>34</sup> Shinpachiro, Goto, *Kanto-Daishinsai ni Okeru Kaigun no Katsudo (jow)* (The Imperial Japanese Navy's Operations for the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake), Heijutsu-Dokokai, 1983.

<sup>35</sup> Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun, morning edition on September 8, 1923, p.3.

*First Submarine Division (Chikuma, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Submarine Divisions, Mansyu)*  
*Special vessels (Tokiwa, 12<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Division)*

*Second Fleet*

*Fourth Squadron (Kongo, Hiei, Kirishima)*  
*Fifth Squadron (Natori, Kinu, Nagara, Yura)*  
*Second Torpedo Flotilla Division (Kitakami, 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Divisions)*  
*Second Submarine Division (Yahagi, 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> submarine divisions)*  
*Special vessels (Karasaki, Wakamiya)*  
*Training Squadron (Iwate, Asama, Yakumo)*

Major telegrams from the first telegram related to the disaster to messages that explain the termination of the relief operations, etc. and the recovery (to the 20<sup>th</sup> telegram) are as follows.

**Combined Fleet 1<sup>st</sup> special order (Combined Fleet Order)<sup>36</sup>**

From: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: Fleet Forces
<p><i>(1) I am in charge of the relief operations of the fleet forces off the coasts of Shinagawa and Yokohama.</i></p> <p><i>(2) The Combined Fleet Command Office is established in the Navy Department for implementing the relief operations.</i></p>	

**Combined Fleet 2<sup>nd</sup> special order (Combined Fleet Order)<sup>37</sup>**

From: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: <i>Yubari</i>
<p><i>(1) Yubari is under the order to move immediately to Yokohama to consult with the Yokohama prison warden and the Army commander and hand about 600 prisoners there over to the Nagoya prison warden.</i></p> <p><i>(2) When that assignment completes, you must carry food from Nagoya and return to Shibaura.</i></p>	

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Hensai-Saigai 7, Vol.159 (0122).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 159 (0149).

The 1<sup>st</sup> special telegram indicates that Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet himself directed the assigned warships off the coasts of Shinagawa and Yokohama near Tokyo and that the Combined Fleet Command had been moved from the flagship *Nagato* to the Navy Department (1<sup>st</sup> special telegram). The reason is thought to be that the Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet kept in close contact with the central command of the Ministry. There were Kosuge, Sugamo, Ichigaya and Toyotama prisons in Tokyo, Yokohama, Urawa, Chiba and Kofu prisons and Odawara juvenile prison in the afflicted areas and a number of prisoners were in jail. When the earthquake occurred, many prison buildings collapsed and it became possible for prisoners to break out of prison. The Yokohama prison was particularly damaged and its cells and other facilities were burnt or collapsed. Therefore, all prisoners (about 1,000) except injured prisoners were released under the condition that they would return to the prison within the 24-hour statutory period. 295 prisoners among those who returned to the prison were transferred to the Nagoya prison under strict supervision by the cruiser *Yubari* and the destroyer *Aoi* (2<sup>nd</sup> special telegram).<sup>38</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> special telegram transmitted on September 6th states that the forces that belong to the Combined Fleet shall implement the assignments related to the earthquake and clerical works of the command shall be carried out in the Navy Department for the time being. In addition, the 4<sup>th</sup> special telegram states that a ground security group consisting of warships hands was formed for the maintenance of security and dispatched for guarding military facilities.

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<sup>38</sup> It was ordered to transfer about 600 prisoners. However, there is a report that only 295 were actually transferred and 200 prisoners did not go aboard and involved in the recovery of prison facilities. There is discrepancy of numbers so that it is unclear whether they were transferred afterward.

**Combined Fleet 3<sup>rd</sup> special order (Combined Fleet Order)<sup>39</sup>**

From: The Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: all
<p><i>(1) Omitted</i></p> <p><i>(2) I am in charge of the fleet forces and implement the following assignments upon consultations with Commander in Chief of the Yokosuka Naval Station, the Kanto martial law administrator and the local government officials concerned and under close coordination with the Naval Disaster Relief Committee.</i></p> <p><i>a) Investigation on the status of coastal areas affected by the earthquake, rescue efforts and maritime transportation</i></p> <p><i>b) Assistance for maritime transportation of materials and personnel for rescue efforts</i></p> <p><i>c) General port duties at Shibaura and Yokohama</i></p> <p><i>d) Maintenance of security of the Naval offices in Tokyo</i></p> <p><i>e) Communications and liaison with each Bureau and Department in the Navy</i></p> <p><i>(3) Actions or assignments of each Fleet are as follows.</i></p> <p><i>a) "Mutsu", "Hiei", "Kirishima", "Karasaki" and the 12<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla shall move to off the coast of Shinagawa.</i></p> <p><i>b) "Ise" and "Hyuga" shall carry relief supplies from Osaka or Kobe or and then move to off the coast of Shinagawa.</i></p> <p><i>c) Third Fleet shall discharge relief supplies off the coast of Shinagawa and then move to Yokohama for the assignment of maintaining security.</i></p> <p><i>d) First Submarine Division shall carry relief supplies via Osaka, Kobe or Yokkaichi and then move to Yokosuka.</i></p> <p><i>e) First Torpedo Flotilla Division, Fifth squadron and Second Submarine Division (without "Karasaki") shall complete the preparation for mobilization and involve in education and trainings in Hiroshima Bay.</i></p> <p><i>f) Admiral Commanding the Second Fleet shall take control of the discharge of relief supplies and personnel off the coast of Shinagawa, assistance of maritime transportation and general port duties at Shibaura. Vessels that stay off the coast of Shinagawa shall seek the direction of Admiral Commanding the Second Fleet with regard to said matters and carry relief supplies, etc., and vessels that move to off the coast of Shinagawa shall report this scheduled arrival time to Commander in Chief of Second Fleet.</i></p> <p><i>g) Second Torpedo Flotilla Division shall take care of investigations on the status of damage caused by the earthquake at coastal areas of the Miura peninsula, the west coast of the Boso peninsula, the Izu peninsula and the Izu islands and those who have completed the assignment or those who do not have a particular need of staying in said areas shall move to Yokosuka. Commander in Chief shall design out an action plan and report it.</i></p> <p><i>(4) Omitted</i></p> <p><i>(5) Administration of Combined Fleet shall be enforced in the Navy Department for the time being.</i></p>	

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 159 (0299-0302).

**Combined Fleet 4<sup>th</sup> special order (Combined Fleet Order)**

**(September 6, 1923)<sup>40</sup>**

From: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: all
<p><i>“Nagato” and “Kongo” shall dispatch ground groups as follows and assign them to take care of the protection of the Technology Institute and communications lines related to the Navy in Tokyo.</i></p> <p><i>Personnel</i></p> <p><i>A naval landing party shall be dispatched from “Nagato” and “Kongo” (4 enlisted men and 56 seamen) everyday</i></p> <p><i>Clothing and duties (omitted)</i></p>	

As mentioned above, the Tokaido line had been disconnected between Shinagawa and Gotenba after the earthquake. Therefore, the maritime transportation depended on the Shimizu port that was used as an intermediate port of vessels that sailed between Kanto and Kansai in those days, and traveled mainly between Tokyo and Shimizu (6<sup>th</sup> special telegram). Under the situation where there was no clear prospect of when the Tokaido line would be recovered, major ports in Sagami Bay near the epicenter were unserviceable due to the damage caused by tsunamis, etc. In addition, the Shimizu port is located the west of Kanto and in frequent use. It is thought, therefore, that it was the most accessible port. The Navy provided public transportation between Shibaura-Shimizu port, Shibaura-Yokosuka, Yokosuka (via Yokohama)-Shibaura. Anyone who applied to the Navy Department could go aboard and there was a plan of increasing transportation vessels gradually if there was any shortage in transportation capacity.<sup>41</sup>

**6<sup>th</sup> special order of the Combined Fleet (Combined Fleet order)**

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 159 (0303).

<sup>41</sup> Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun, morning edition on September 8, 1923, p.3.

(September 7, 1923)<sup>42</sup>

From: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: all
<p><i>Admiral Commanding the Training Squadron shall implement the assignment of maritime transportation as follows.</i></p> <p><i>1. Schedule (omitted)</i></p> <p><i>2. Action</i></p> <p><i>At 1:00 p.m., leave off the coast of Shinagawa for Shimizu. After passengers from Tokyo have been discharged, passengers from Shimizu shall aboard and return to the coast of Shinagawa.</i></p> <p><i>3. (Omitted)</i></p> <p><i>4. Relief supplies shall be carried when you return from Shimizu to off the coast of Shinagawa.</i></p>	

**8<sup>th</sup> special order of the Combined Fleet (Combined Fleet order)**

(September 7, 1923)<sup>43</sup>

From: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: all
<p><i>1. A naval pier command shall be established in Shibaura and the commanding officer of Nagato shall be assigned as its commander. The commander shall take control of the discharge and carriage of supplies at the Shibaura pier and neighboring areas, supervision of works, arrangement of passengers and other works particularly ordered (hereinafter omitted).</i></p>	

The shore command was established near the naval dock in Shibaura early on September 7th, and the commanding officer of *Nagato* was assigned as a naval dock commander and he took control of transporting and carrying supplies (8<sup>th</sup> special order).

**14<sup>th</sup> special order of the Combined Fleet (Combined Fleet order)**

(September 12, 1923)<sup>44</sup>

From: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: all
<p><i>Izumo shall leave Shinagawa at 1:00 p.m. on September 18th and arrive at Yokosuka at 3:00 p.m. on September 19th return to Sasebo after stopping off Kobe when its assignment of transporting evacuees completed (hereinafter</i></p>	

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 159 (0306).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Hensai-Saigai 6, Vol.158 (1697).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Hensai-Saigai 7, Vol.159 (0325).

*omitted).*

Telegrams were sent out that ordered vessels to return to their original ports from September 12th just 10 days have passed from the disaster (14<sup>th</sup> special order). It was ordered that vessels that had implemented relief and support activities to gradually return to their original missions and endeavor to have resupplied and take rest. Moreover, it was permitted for people who were born in the afflicted areas to take a leave of absence within 3 days, and a leave of absence of up to 5 days if it involved a family hardship. There were a number of naval ship hands who had lost their immediate family members but participated in the relief operations particularly in Yokosuka without regards to their own concerns. The shore command of the Combined Fleet established at the Navy Department was dismantled on September 21st (20<sup>th</sup> special order).

**20<sup>th</sup> special order of the Combined Fleet (Combined Fleet order)**

**(September 17, 1923)<sup>45</sup>**

From: Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet	To: all
<p><i>1. You shall return to your original command after September 22nd.</i></p> <p><i>2. (Omitted)</i></p> <p><i>3. Each vessel shall move to Yokohama as ordered by the fleet commander depending on the status of works and be resupplied and take rest.</i></p> <p><i>4. Victims of the earthquake and persons who are from the afflicted areas (including those who have their family members or relatives in those areas) shall be permitted to take a leave of absence to take care of family responsibilities within the period not exceeding 5 days and 3 days, respectively.</i></p> <p><i>5. Combined Fleet Command Office at the Navy Department shall be dismantled by September 21st.</i></p> <p><i>6. (Omitted)</i></p> <p><i>7. (Omitted)</i></p>	

Concerning aerial reconnaissance, according to the reports related to the disaster by the Kasumigaura Naval Flying Corps, two ground training aircrafts and one sea reconnaissance seaplane scouted the status of damage

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 159 (03).

in Tokyo, Yokohama and Yokosuka areas at 8:00 am on September 2nd, and its results were reported to the police authorities, and the government authorities. Such important information was a source to newspapers and was the only source for the general public to receive information about the disaster and to prevent panic. It also served for subsequent recovery measures. From September 5th, the Navy engaged in regular communication flights between Kasumigaura (Kasumigaura Naval Flying Corps)-Tokyo (Yoyogi Airport)-Yokosuka (Yokosuka Naval Flying Corps (Oppama)), reconnaissance and mutual communication. Moreover, according to the Naval Relief Committee report, a routine flight between Yokosuka and near the Shibaura naval pier using water aircraft that belong to the Yokosuka Naval Flying Corps was established from September 7th and they engaged in the transportation of documents. The following table explains the assignments entrusted to the vessel forces under the control of the Yokosuka Naval Station in the initial stages after the disaster occurred (September 2nd-September 7th, 1923). *The Taisho Great Quake Fire Record* describes the status of activities of organizations related to the Yokosuka Naval Station as follows.

*Hands were dispatched to Yokosuka and neighboring municipalities immediately after the earthquake and they engaged in the maintenance of security and rescue of the afflicted people in cooperation with local police officers. On the night of September 2nd, some vessels were dispatched swiftly to and made some hands land Isogo. Their crews patrolled some parts of the city and gave the afflicted people a great sense of security. Martial law was issued on September 3rd. As soon as the public noticed that Yokosuka and the Miura district have become subject to the authority of Commander in Chief of the Yokosuka Naval Station on September 5th, the command was established in the Headquarters of Naval Station and the martial law district was divided into four areas. They had to protected the afflicted people with their full strength by engaging in various operations such as the rescue of residents under jurisdiction, recovery of communication equipment,*

*opening of closed roads, cleaning up of burnt city areas and restration of the water supply and electricity and significantly contribute to promoting the reconstruction project.*<sup>46</sup>

**Assignments of forces under command of the Yokosuka Naval Station**

Participating vessel	Assignments
Battleship <i>Asahi</i>	Temporary shelter
Naval Gunnery school	Same as above
Battleship <i>Mikasa</i>	Temporary shelter for prisoners
Battleship <i>Satsuma</i>	Temporary shelter for naval engineering school trainees
Battleship <i>Aki</i>	Temporary shelter for Naval air force officers
Battleship <i>Haruna</i>	For operation room of the injured
Cruiser <i>Isuzu</i> , Destroyer <i>Hatsushimo</i>	Security patrol of Yokohama
Destroyer <i>Shigure</i>	For returning of the Imperial family to Tokyo
Special vessel <i>Fuji</i>	Communications between Tokyo and Yokosuka (via off the coast of Shinagawa) and maritime transportation of the Army soldiers between Tokyo and Yokohama
Submarine Tender <i>Jingei</i>	Transportation of evacuees from Yokosuka to Shimizu and of food from Shimizu
Fifth destroyer division	Transportation of interior officers who were on a business trip to Osaka between Shimizu and Tokyo
Destroyers / torpedo boats	Sea patrol of the Miura peninsula
Military band members	Security Ground Forces and other duties
Yokosuka Air Force (aircrafts on the Carrier <i>Hosho</i> )	Reconnaissance of the status of the earthquake and taking aerial photography along the coast of the southernmost part of Musashi, Sagami, Izu and Boso peninsulas
Kasumigaura Air Force	Reconnaissance of the status of the earthquake and taking aerial photography of the coasts of Awa, Kazusa and Shimousa.
Special vessel <i>Takasaki</i>	Transportation of injured and family members who wish to move (Yokosuka-Kure)
Destroyer <i>Tanikaze</i>	Transportation of family members who wish to move (Yokosuka-Kure)
Cruiser <i>Hirado</i>	Same as above

**(3) Arbitrary decision and execution by on-site commanders with regard to**

<sup>46</sup> Kanagawa Prefectural Police Department, "Taisho Quake Fire History," p.802.

**ports used by foreign vessels**

When four or five days had passed after the disaster, foreign rescue vessels started to enter Tokyo Bay frequently. Rear Admiral Seizo Kobayashi, Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron, First Fleet, Combined Fleet (hereinafter referred to as RADM Kobayashi) had made liaison officers take care of the coordination with foreign vessels that entered the port, in particular the US Asiatic Fleet. In those days, the ports where foreign vessels had been permitted to enter were confined to Hakodate, Niigata, Yokohama, Kobe and Nagasaki for national security reasons. The Japanese government did not want foreign vessels to use Shibaura and Shinagawa in Tokyo. In addition, because the entire Shonan area south of Yokohama was regarded as a fortified zone, it did not want foreign countries to know the status of damage to the facilities related to the Yokosuka Naval Station. The Imperial Japanese Navy particularly feared that the navigation of foreign vessels in Tokyo Bay, Sagami Bay, etc. would help foreign countries come to know the status of damage caused by the earthquake and that national defense secrets may be leaked. As explained above, there were many fortresses near Tokyo Bay so that it was necessary to obtain prior permission from the senior command when a foreign vessel entered the above said port. However, there was a commander there who permitted foreign vessels to enter the port without permission. A telegram transmitted from the commanding officer of Battleship *Yamashiro* to the Vice-Minister of Navy on September 6th says the following.

*The three USN destroyers solicited permission for entering the port in order to rescue US citizens in Hakone, Kamakura and Hayama. I provided them permission at my discretion. I would like to ask for your approval.*<sup>47</sup>

This telegram indicates that the commanding officer permitted the entrance to a port other than the Yokohama port at his discretion and asked

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Hensai-Saigai 9, Vol.161 (0245).

for retrospective approval. In addition, although Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron had maintained the security of the Yokohama port, he permitted US vessels to enter a closed seaport at his discretion as a senior commander. Therefore, he was criticized by the Minister of Navy for a bungled handing of his responsibility as “*it was not too late to ask me once, because said area is a fortified zone.*”<sup>48</sup> It was thought to be an inevitable response, because a passive attitude of waiting for instructions by going through formal procedures in such an emergency situation would interfere with rescue operations that require a sense of urgency and swiftness taking into accounts the communications capability of vessels in those days. Problems had already arisen when a foreign vessel entered the Tokyo port on September 13th. Therefore, Foreign Minister Gonbei Yamamoto sent a document that said that “even if warships enter Tokyo port, water routes have been changed after the earthquake off the coasts of Tokyo and Shinagawa and there are a number of small and big Japanese ships in port. Therefore, it is difficult to ensure safety of navigation. In addition, even if vessels anchored temporarily in the Tokyo port, the Shibaura discharge place has been destroyed and it is extremely difficult to land using the provisional pier. Based on these reasons, I would like to ask you to enter the Yokohama port unless there special permission granted later on. In the Yokohama port, there are some piers available so that it is more plausible to land relief supplies sent for Tokyo area from there”<sup>49</sup> to ambassadors of countries that dispatch vessels scheduled to enter the Tokyo port for participating in the relief operations in the afflicted areas. He asked for the use of the Yokohama port for reasons of security and for its facilities. This tells us that the Japanese government and the Minister of Navy were in a difficult situation where they had to consider the conservation of military secrets such as a number of fortresses and military factories in Tokyo Bay and the goodwill of foreign countries.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 161 (0297).

<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan ed., *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho Taisho 12-nen Dai-1-satsu (Taisho-ki Dai-37-satsu)* (Japanese Diplomatic Document, 1923 Vol.1 (Taisho Period Vol.37)), p.569.

## 4 Relief operations by the US Navy

### (1) Actions of the Asiatic Fleet and response of the Japanese government

On September 2nd, the US Department of the Navy ordered Admiral Anderson, Commander in Chief of the Asiatic Fleet (hereinafter referred to as Admiral Anderson), who had stayed in Qinghuang Island, China, to dispatch vessels to Japan for the relief operations related to the great earthquake that had occurred in Japan.<sup>50</sup> Admiral Anderson arranged for one destroyer to enter Nagasaki on September 4th as a communication vessel and assigned it to establish a wireless communications system in order to secure coastal and Pacific communications networks. One destroyer for the relief operations was dispatched to Kobe where US citizens from Yokohama had already been evacuated to on September 5th.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the commander ordered six destroyers carry a large quantity of relief supplies from the US Army warehouse in Tianjin, China, to head to Japan.<sup>52</sup> He was on board the flagship “USS *Huron*” and procured food supplies in Zhifu, China, and entered the Yokohama port.<sup>53</sup>

At the same time, Philippine Governor Leonard Wood who was in Manila had received the order for mobilization to Japan from the US Department of the Army on the afternoon of September 2nd. George Read, Commander of the stationary troops in the Philippines, had 3000 beds, 150 tons of medical supplies, 750 tons of food and a medical support force consisting mainly from the Army (18 doctors and 60 nurses) aboard on September 5th. He himself came aboard the ship and left for Yokohama.<sup>54</sup>

Though the purpose of dispatching US Naval warships was to

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 161 (0232).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 161 (0235).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 161 (0307).

<sup>53</sup> USS *Huron* implemented a gun-salute for the Imperial Japanese Navy ships when it entered the Yokohama port. However, Japanese destroyers reported to the higher command that it is not possible for Japanese destroyers to implement a gun-salute, because evacuees were aboard for a security reason. Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron also requested the notification that a gun-salute is impossible to implement to the US Embassy through the Ministry of the Navy. (Ibid., 161 (0248)).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 161 (0297).

participate in the relief operations for Japan, they also transferred US citizens in Tokyo to Yokohama and western Japan and American victims who lived in the Shonan area. Imperial Japanese Navy's destroyers accompanied US warships that participated in those operations for surveillance. I have already mentioned that a number of foreign vessels started to enter and leave closed ports in support of the relief operations where foreign vessels had been prohibited to leave or enter. As a result of consultations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Navy Department on September 9th, however, the decisions were made with regard to the future entry of US vessels to closed ports that 1) a rescue center shall be established in Yokohama, 2) US vessels shall engage in the transportation of evacuees between Yokohama and Shimizu, 3) the cargo vessel USS *Meigs* and the torpedo tender USS *Black Hawk* shall sail from Shibaura and back to Yokohama when they are to complete the discharge of on-board supplies, 4) the cargo vessel USS *Merrit* and the coal ship USS *Pecos* shall sail to Yokohama and discharge on-board supplies and 5) liaison officers shall be dispatched from Combined Fleet to the US Command and other directions.<sup>55</sup>

On September 11th, the Japanese government decided in its cabinet meeting the guidelines for relief operations of each country as follows. 1) Japan is willing to accept food (excluding rice) and other necessary supplies, 2) Japan appreciates the kind proposal to dispatch personnel for the relief operations but declines said proposal. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall take appropriate measures for persons who have already arrived in Japan or who are on the way to Japan. Japan shall decline the provision of transportation vessels, and 3) when any vessel enters a port to provide food and other relief supplies, government officials in charge shall be dispatched to said vessel for inspection before its crews are permitted to land and cargos are discharged.<sup>56</sup>

Admiral Anderson continued to participate in the relief operations for Japan till September 21st and then returned to Shanghai. However, private

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 161 (0254-0255).

<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan ed., *ibid.*, pp.560-561.

notes of Frederick Moore, then advisor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at that time, described that “the US Navy vigorously engaged in intelligence operations in order not to fall behind other countries (Snip). This is an act that would destroy the friendship of the two countries.”<sup>57</sup> and gave his country a warning. This shows that operatives whose assignment was to collect information were on board US vessels and had engaged in intelligence gathering operations during their stay in Japan.

## **(2) Diplomatic confusion between Japan and the US**

Although the US Navy cargo vessel USS *Merrit* entered the Yokohama port to establish a field hospital, there were misunderstandings on the transportation and discharge of materials between Japan and the US. Thus, Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron appealed to Keisuke Okada, the Vice-Minister of Navy on September 11th as follows.

*The decision was made between the Japanese government and the US government through diplomatic channels to establish a rescue center in Yokohama as the main assignment of the US Asiatic Fleet. Therefore, the US cargo vessel USS “Merrit” was expected to arrive at Yokohama on September 16th with all materials and personnel necessary for constructing a field hospital. However, Kanagawa Prefecture and the city of Yokohama were not happy with this decision and claimed that there was no such need. The place for construction has not been selected due to this reason. Their way of thinking was very different to our own and complicated situations could arise if we leave this matter uncontrolled. I would like to request for your urgent consideration of this matter upon consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ask you to order the city of Yokohama to construct a field hospital or take materials to Tokyo. In this way, we can avoid rejecting materials and personnel provided by the US with great hardship and costs, because the*

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<sup>57</sup> NHK news crew ed., *When the history changed 5*, KTC Chuoh Publishing, 2001, p.184.

*procedures have been settled through diplomatic channels.*<sup>58</sup>

On the following day, September 12th, a telegram was transmitted from Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet to Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron in response to the said request. The telegram said that 1) an agreement has been made with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Home Ministry that a rescue center will be constructed in Yokohama. There is no doubt that a direction to that effect will be given to the prefectural office<sup>59</sup> and that 2) the vice minister already consulted with the mayor with regard to the decision that a rescue center would be constructed near the Yamashita Bridge in Yokohama.<sup>60</sup>

However, another telegram was transmitted from Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron to the Vice-Minister of Navy on September 15th as follows.

*USS "Merrit" entered the Yokohama port at 11:00 a.m. on September 15th. The harbor office director visited her at 11:30 a.m. and insisted that there was a notice from the Minister of Home Affairs that all discharge of cargo from said vessel shall be suspended. He also expressed his opinions on the cargo of said vessel was for a field hospital. However, he had heard of the telegram on the decision that it should be established in Yokohama. An order to discharge the cargo has already been planned upon consultation with the Commander in Chief of the US Asiatic Fleet. If the discharge of cargo was suspended, it is a concern that sentiments between the two parties would worsen. I would like to request your immediate consideration to the fact that said decision has already been in action.*<sup>61</sup>

In response to this telegram, the Vice-Minister of Navy wired the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 161 (0276-0277).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 161 (0287).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 161 (0289).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 161 (0317).

following telegram.

*The matter of the discharge of cargos from USS "Merrit" and of the establishment of a rescue center will be discussed in the cabinet meeting today. Ministries concerned have the intention to execute the decision. The response of the harbor office director at your place is thought to be an error. I would like to ask you to immediately prepare for executing said decision upon consultation with the parties concerned.*<sup>62</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Navy Department consulted the matter concerning the place for constructing a rescue center and a decision had been made on September 9th. Then, this was approved by the cabinet on September 12th. However, as this information did not reach the persons in charge in the field, the decision had not been implemented thoroughly. This is thought to have had caused a discrepancy between the Navy Department and field forces and created confusion.<sup>63</sup>

### **(3) News report in the US**

In other countries, a telegram on the status of Japan transmitted from the military attaché of the Japanese Embassy in the US to the Naval Undersecretary and the deputy director of the military command on September 10th says that *"there was a report that the Yokosuka port was completely destroyed and that a number of Japanese warships went down."*<sup>64</sup> Also, there was information in the US that there were people who secretly intended to promote that the contribution of large amount of cash to Japan would help the recovery of the Japanese Navy.<sup>65</sup> Chicago Tribune's correspondent Matheson who lived in Japan transmitted the content of the report from Consul Yoshida in Chicago to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 161 (0319).

<sup>63</sup> There is a telegram concerning the review of discharging cargos of the transportation vessel USS *Merrit* that "it was found out that the request of the harbor office director was a complete error." (Ibid., 161 (0327))

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 161 (0246).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 161 (0247).

September as follow. 1) *When the US Navy swiftly arrived at Yokohama in order to participate in the relief operations, the Japanese Navy committed an act that seemed to be in an obstructive behavior, 2) When a Japanese destroyer collected a imperial family member's dead body in Kamakura, it did not allow a number of foreigners to come aboard and a notice that prohibited the entrance of foreign vessels to said area was sent and 3) it was prohibited for Commander of the US Fleet to dispatch their fleets to Tokyo and neighboring areas.*<sup>66</sup> In response to this report, Foreign Minister Hikokichi Ijyuin wired a telegram to Consul Yoshida in Chicago on September 22nd. The telegram said *"the report of Mr. Matheson included a number of falsehood (Snip). It is in fact incorrect that the Japanese government authorities committed any acts that obstructed the support of the US Navy in Yokohama (Snip). The report on the prohibition of dispatching US vessels to Tokyo and neighboring areas means that nonmilitary vessels were prohibited to enter or leave said areas for a smooth discharge of relief supplies and goods at Shibaura at that time. This was an inevitable measure taken during a chaotic situation, but there was no intention to discriminate against US vessels. In particular, there is no truth to the report that US destroyers are prohibited to enter or leave Tokyo Bay."*<sup>67</sup> He also gave an instruction to disclose information where necessary.

Notwithstanding such measures, the evening paper on September 27th reported with the headline that *"the Japanese humiliated the US Navy and Japanese government authorities made an excuse."* Its content was as follows. *"US vessels were treated as if they were a nuisance. Many Japanese and Japanese government petty officials thought that they entered Tokyo Bay to take advantage of chaotic situation in Japan without knowing that the Japanese government had given them approval for entering these vital places. Therefore, one government official went aboard a destroyer that had anchored in Tokyo Bay and requested its departure. In addition, two destroyers were ordered to follow the US destroyer and search lights were irradiated. Furthermore, it was requested that round trips be cancelled*

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 161 (0350).

<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan ed., *ibid.*, p.592.

*between vessels anchoring in Yokohama and the US Embassy in Tokyo Japan due to congestion in the Yokohama port.*<sup>68</sup> It is an extremely serious diplomatic problem that information different from the truth is reported overseas, and this could lead to a diplomatic crisis. This case shed light on the immature response by the Japanese government and the Japanese people in those days towards foreign media showed the immaturity of Japanese diplomacy. At first, foreign media reported that misunderstandings arose between Japan and the US due to busy schedules and poor negotiation skills of Japanese government officials. However, this problem was solved as time passed. This set a precedent that misunderstandings, false reports and harmful rumors are likely to develop when a government receives the support of foreign forces, and we also continually need to pay sufficient attention to this matter even in modern times.

## **5 Confidence-building and friendship between on-site commanders of the Japanese and US Navies**

Although RADM Kobayashi of Third Squadron received a warning from the Minister of Navy because he gave permission at his discretion, he greatly demonstrated the spirit of confidence-building between the two navies of Japan and US by taking charge of the US vessels sailing in the area. A telegram transmitted to the captain of the 1<sup>st</sup> class cruiser *Asama* scheduled to enter the Shimizu port on September 12th reveals such spirit.

*The two US destroyers carrying 600 evacuees from Yokohama are scheduled to arrive at the Shimizu port around 12:00 p.m. on September 12th. I request your sufficient support for the discharge of those evacuees and other matters. I request that you consult with local officers in advance before those vessels enter the port today.*<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 161 (0336).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 161 (0291).

It is exceedingly unusual to transmit a telegram that requests prior coordination for vessels scheduled to enter the Shimizu port since the port was not under the direct control of Combined Fleet despite the port falling under its jurisdiction. This indicates special consideration given to US vessels engaging in the relief operations.

A telegram transmitted from RADM Kobayashi to Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet on September 19th said *“the US vessel (Meigs) carries some materials for a field hospital under construction. In order to receive that material, the US Navy tugboat was permitted to sail into Shibaura. I am wiring you this telegram just in case you have not heard anything”*.<sup>70</sup>

The above telegram displays arbitrary decision making and execution on part of the field commander, who at same-time expected US vessels to implement relief operations smoothly while taking precedence the rules. The observation made by Admiral Anderson later when he left Yokohama explains and supports these points clearly.

A telegram transmitted from Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet to Admiral Commanding Third Squadron on September 18th, when the completion for the US Asiatic Fleet was getting closer, contained the following:

*When Lieutenant General Read from the US Army visited us on September 17th, I expressed are sincere gratitude for the support provided by the US in the name of the IJN. He replied that it is an obligation for a neighboring country like the Philippines to provide our friends who are suffering during such a disaster with our full support. My visit to Japan is no exception.*<sup>71</sup>

Such content reveals to us that the relief operations of the US forces were evidence of a strong friendship.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 161 (0339).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 161 (0407-0408).

Moreover, a telegram transmitted from Third Squadron commander to the Vice-Minister of Navy on September 21st describes a ceremony of an exchange of a naval gun salute was implemented between the US Navy and the Japanese Navy.

*USS "Huron" left for Shanghai at 2:00 p.m. on September 21st with eight destroyers. When they left the port, they did a naval gun salute to the national flag so we replied in kind with a gun-salute.<sup>72</sup>*

Liaison Officer Lieutenant Soji who was stationed in Third Squadron recorded it as information in Yokohama area as follows on September 21st.

*The US Admiral offered to exchange a naval gun salute to the national flag when they left the port, because he wished to express his special friendship and make vessels of other countries understand how deep the relationship between Japan and the US was. Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron accepted this offer so that they could exchange a naval gun salute. Both of them were satisfied<sup>73</sup>.*

Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron reported the departure of the US Asiatic Fleet from Yokohama to the Vice-Minister of Navy on September 21st as follows.

*Before they left, I visited the admiral of the US Asiatic Fleet to express my appreciation for their support and to pray for his future health and prosperity. The admiral changed his attitude and appreciated the favorable treatment given by the Imperial Government, particularly the Navy Department after he succeeded as Commander in Chief of the Asiatic Fleet. He also expressed his gratitude, because it was not hard to complete his mission due to frank negotiations with the naval authority after he arrived at Japan for the relief operations of this earthquake. He*

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 161 (0349).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 161 (0354).

*praised the people's spirit toward reconstruction in spite of an unprecedented disaster in the history (Snip). All US citizens want the friendship between Japan and the US and wish for the prosperity of Japan. The US Navy particularly has a good impression of the Japanese Navy. US citizens worked hard to rescue the Japanese people unexpectedly in response to your country's disaster and the US Navy expressed sincerity in using its limited capability. Such actions back up the above-mentioned discussion in detail.<sup>74</sup>*

In addition to the above-mentioned observation, I have already mentioned that a salute-exchange with respect to the national flag and the command flag was implemented.<sup>75</sup> He adds that actions of the Asiatic Fleet were extremely effective, the commitment of Admiral Anderson was sincere and friendly and there is no doubt that Admiral Anderson left the port of Yokohama with a good impression.<sup>76</sup> His attitude until he departed was excellent. As this report describes, the relationship of trust between the Japanese Navy and the US Navy deepened greatly at that time. The attitude of the US Navy Asiatic Fleet was an example for the actions of foreign forces that came to provide support. Although it was at the discretion of Japanese on-site commanders, the partnership between the two countries' navies exercised to full extent and the coordination was implemented on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, the relief operations by US vessels were implemented extremely smoothly on the scene at the discretion of Admiral Commanding the Third Squadron.

## **Conclusion**

The Imperial Japanese Navy executed its assignments with the determination to cancel the inspection of naval maneuvers and overseas deployment during the relief operations and its contribution was

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 161 (0401).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 161 (0402).

significantly throughout the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake. The morning edition of Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun of September 20th describes it as follows with the headline that “the Navy is worthy of receiving credit in this disaster.”

*It was the first time that the Navy devoted its energy to transporting food, relief supplies, building materials and evacuees for relief operations. In particular, it was the first time for the Imperial Japanese Navy to permit citizens to come freely aboard vessels. When the transportation system of food was paralyzed, the Navy provided people transportation with all their might. The afflicted people could receive not only food but also various daily supplies. It is not an exaggeration to say that the person or organization who made the most valuable contribution to the relief operations was the Navy.<sup>77</sup>*

The Imperial Japanese Navy rapidly launched the Naval Earthquake Relief Committee in the Navy Department and transported the affected people who lost their homes to different places, provided relief supplies and food mainly to Shinagawa and Yokohama and maintained the peace and harmony by dispatching ground troops and by engaging them in peacekeeping operations. The Navy could dedicate its resources, because they had secured their communications system at an early stage in the disaster and they could operate effectively, particularly maritime transportation capability on the seas that were hardly affected by the earthquake. Moreover, the Navy had good fortune since the epicenter of the Great Kanto Earthquake was near Sagami Bay and Tokyo Bay, which became the strategic point of the relief operations, was not affected by the tsunamis. Therefore, the use of ports for maritime transportation was possible as usual. As a result, the Navy which had been a target of the reduction in budget because of the arms reduction treaty after the Washington Conference and budget austerity measures made the public feel

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<sup>77</sup> Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun, evening edition on September 20, 1923, p.1.

its presence through additional assignments and activities after the earthquake, that is, the relief operations. The values of armed forces (Navy) were greatly recognized.

During this time, Combined Fleet that belonged to the afflicted areas and the Yokosuka Naval Station engaged in the relief operations with the same determination as if in wartime and showed a high cope capability in this situation. In the relief activities that continued for about two weeks after the great earthquake occurred, the Imperial Japanese Navy demonstrated their real potential to the people and made the public understand the purpose of the existence of the armies to protect peace and maintain security. In particular, the action of the Funabashi Transmitting Station chief who transmitted the urgency of the situation to the naval forces and organizations through wireless transmission immediately after the disaster was a result of the awareness of his duty as a commander and showed an ability to judge appropriately the situation. This demonstrated the high quality of Japanese naval officers during those days.

Although most of the Yokosuka urban areas collapsed or was burnt down, compared to the civil unrest and chaotic situations in Tokyo and Yokohama, Yokosuka was extremely quiet. As it was a naval city, there was no disturbing behavior such as riots that occurred in other disaster-struck cities. The relief and security measures that were implemented swiftly calmed down the people and public order recovered quickly. This is attributable to the factors that there were a limited number of populated areas remaining and the number of houses and population were small in the southern and western areas, but the presence of the Army and the Navy was also important.

The relief operations by the US Navy were extraordinary compared to other countries' navies, in terms of the quantity of supplies and swiftness of response. Although the Japanese government had difficulty in how to respond, the Navy played a role as a mediator between the two countries. The United States had become a major military power in the world after World War II and it is extraordinary not only in the material sense but also in the field of intelligence gathering. The US appealed such qualities to the

entire world through those relief operations and exploited the presence of the Navy to a great extent. The Navy has, in particular, received a high evaluation.

Both the Imperial Japanese Navy and the US Navy demonstrated their capabilities to the fullest extent and the people were proud of them. Under an emergency, the people tend to depend on such powers. This is applicable to modern times as well. In the 1923 Kanto Great Earthquake, the Army demonstrated its security maintenance capability, technological capability, mobilization capability and fairness by rescuing the afflicted people without discrimination. Particularly, in the Taisho era when democratic consciousness was emerging in Japan, a strong impression that the Army was to reliable was shown to the people. At an early stage after the disaster, the coordination between the Japanese government and the US Asiatic Fleet was so poor that field commanders of the Imperial Japanese Navy intervened and acted as mediators. As we could see in the observations of the US Navy on-site commanders, the relief operations were implemented extremely smoothly at on-site commander's level. This proves that there is only one sea and they sufficiently demonstrated the spirit of Navy to Navy. I suppose that the spirit or DNA, peculiar to the Japanese to accept foreign cultures and customs without protest and integrate them into the Japanese culture from ancient times blossomed by the visit of Perry and affinity toward the US had been created. Such affinity had no doubt been carried into the Taisho era. The 1923 Kanto Great Earthquake further deepened the affinity towards the US, in particular, by the Imperial Japanese Navy. Although there were sad periods such as the enactment of the Japanese Exclusion Act in the year following to the great earthquake and the Pacific War, I have no doubt that from that time there existed a ground for building a sense of trust and friendship between the two Navies.