

おかがき覗き見

国際交流員の目から見た岡垣

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岡垣町消防団長：占部力氏インタビュー

THE COMMISSIONER OF THE OKAGAKI FIRE BRIGADE: AN INTERVIEW WITH CHIKARA URABE

「コミュニケーションを取ったり、そういうのが一番大事なことでと私は思う」

占部力団長、76歳、が岡垣町消防団第二分団格納庫で、団長としての仕事についての考えを私に話す。格納庫は消防団のものでいっぱいになっている。近くの小学

校からもらった色鮮やかな応援メッセージ——壁に広げてある消防団の昔

の制服であった紺色の法被と、その背中のところはっぴに白くプリントされた「岡垣」の大きい字——赤地の団旗に白く描かれた、日本の消防団のマークの桜の花。

同じマークは団長の制服にも見える。胸の右のポケットの上の金色のプレートには三つの桜の花が浮き彫られ、消防団長であることを示す。

「コミュニケーションを取ったり、そういうのが一番大事なことでと私は思う」

“Communication,” says the Commissioner. “I think that’s the most important thing.”

Commissioner Chikara Urabe, 76, sits opposite me in the meeting room of the Second Volunteer Fire Station, talking about his work as the Commissioner of Okagaki’s Fire Brigade. Markers of the fire brigade

fill the room: a colourfully decorated message of support from a local primary school; dark cotton happi coats, the former uniform of the brigade, on display on a wall, OKAGAKI printed on the backs in large white characters; the brigade flag with a cherry blossom, the insignia of Japan’s volunteer fire and rescue services, printed large on a red background.

The insignia is also in evidence on the Commissioner’s uniform. A gold bar embossed with three cherry blossoms sits above his right chest pocket, marking his position as head of the Local Fire Brigade.



占部力（岡垣町消防団長）

占部氏は1977年に岡垣町消防団に入った。長年にわたって消防団に所属しその間、団員から部長に、部長から分団長になり、そして2005年に団長に任命された。団長として務めて今年で11年目——これはとりわけ長い期間だそうだとになり、岡垣町の消防への貢献で色々な賞を授与されている。他にも三里松原防風保安林浸食対策協議会会長としても、まつり岡垣実行委員会会員としても地域で大きく活躍している。

COMMISSIONER URABE

Chikara Urabe joined Okagaki’s Local Fire Brigade in 1977. He rose through the ranks from ordinary brigadier to Captain and then Section Chief, finally taking up the mantle of Commissioner in 2005. He has served as the Commissioner of Okagaki’s Local Fire Brigade for eleven years now – a particularly long period of service – and has won various awards for his contributions to local fire and rescue services. His other activities include serving as the Chairman of the Committee for the Preservation and Protection of the Sanry Matsubara Forest Reserve from Erosion, and as a member of the Matsuri Okagaki executive committee.



岡垣町消防団第二分団格納庫に立つ占部団長

団長にインタビューをお願いしたのは、岡垣町で大きく活躍している一人に光を当てようと思ったからだ。インタビューの準備をしていた時に団長について話した人たちの全員が団長のことを高く評価し、男性からも女性からも尊敬されている。この人は何で団長という位置に上がったのか、何の特性があって消防団の頭に立つようになったのかを知りたい。その考えで占部団長についての質問でインタビューを進もうとするが、団長が自分自身より消防、または消防団自体について話す方が面白いようだ。

占部団長は初めて消防団に入ったのは二十歳の頃だった。当時は男性が消防団に入るのは当たり前なことで、農業学校を卒業して2年経っていたある日、占部団長はあまり深く考えず岡垣町消防団第2分団に入団した。

そして、消防団を本当に好きになった、やろうと思わせたのは、入ってすぐのできごとだった。

毎年、出初式の後に、団員は相互の親睦を図るための旅行をする。年の始まりに行われるため、真冬に行くことになる。初めての親睦旅行も例外ではなかった。

「寒かった」と団長。「学校出てすぐやけさ、外套なんか持たんしさ…その時にね、先輩がやっぱり、自分の外套を脱いでね、俺に着せてくれたよ。そういうのがね、ものすごくあったかく感じたんよね。消防っていいなって（笑）」

消防のこういうところ——団員のお互いの絆、親睦旅行や集合の時の暖かさ——が消防団の一番好きなどころだそうだ。あの時も、今も。「コミュニケーションするのは楽しいです」と団長。「この楽しみで行きよる人がおるよ」

日本の消防団は根本的に地方に繋がり、団員は全員地域の住民である。消防署で消防を職業にして生計を立てる消防士と違って、消防団員はボランティアで働



昔の制服 「法被」

I asked the Commissioner for an interview in order to put a spotlight on a notable member of the local community of Okagaki. Everyone I have spoken to about the Commissioner in preparing for the interview has said that he is a highly respected man, admired by both men and women, and I begin the interview in the hope of finding out what it is about this man that has enabled him to rise through the ranks of the Fire Brigade to the position of Commissioner. But every time I try to ask him about himself, he seems more interested in talking about fire-fighting, and about the Fire Brigade.

The Commissioner first joined the Fire Brigade as a young man of twenty. At the time it was almost expected that men join the fire brigade, and Commissioner Urabe, having graduated an agricultural high school not two years prior, joined the brigade without much thought.

What made him feel truly glad to be part of the fire brigade was something that happened a short while after he joined.

Every year, after the New Year's Fire Review, brigadiers go on a trip together with the aim of building and strengthening mutual bonds. Since these trips are scheduled for the start of the year, they tend to occur in the middle of winter. The Commissioner's first such trip was no exception.

"It was cold," the Commissioner tells me. "I was just out of school. I didn't own an overcoat... And my senior, he took off his own overcoat and had me wear it. That sort of thing, you know – I could really feel the warmth in it. I thought to myself, ain't the Fire Brigade great." He laughs.

This aspect of fire-fighting – the bond between the members, the warmth of the meetings and trips – was what he liked most about the fire brigade, both then and now. "It's the communication that's fun," he says. "There are people that go just for that, you know."

Japan's volunteer fire brigades are quintessentially local,



内浦小学校から送られた応援メッセージ

く、つまり普段の仕事と個人生活の上に消防団の活動を果たす。消防団の一員として、呼び出された時に他のことに目もくれずに現場に行って火と闘う、という精神でいるべきだと占部団長が言う。

そういう生活は大変ではないかと団長に聞いたら、「大変。確かに大変」と団長が即答。団長自身は自分の時間を犠牲にすることが多く、昔は寝る時間もほとんどない時も結構あった。特技は必要だったらいつでもどこでも寝れること、と団長が冗談を言う。

もちろん、消防自体は昔も今も楽な仕事ではない。そして団長がまだ団員だった頃、昭和の終わりの頃、消防は全然違うものだった。

「火災なんか多かったね、昔の方は」と団長が振り返る。人はまだご飯を炊くことやお風呂を温めることに日常生活に火を使っていたし、消防車や消火用のホースなど今日当然のものだと思う消火道具はまだ使われていなかった。火事は今より多かった——住宅火災、あびみち畦畔・土手の火事…

と、山火事。

「その時にね、自分も経験がなかったせいもあるけど、山火事でね、とにかく怖かった」

あの頃、水を直接山火事に届ける方法は少なかった。最寄りの川から水を取ることもしばしば。仕事で、水を使わずに火を消さなければならない時もよくあった。



消防について語る団長

「柴とか、ああいうので叩いて消して。…山火事では良く火が飛ぶんよ。竹山だったんけね、竹っていうのはね、笹が燃えてくんよ。ばばば、と。」

「んで、ぽっと振り返ったら、自分の後ろが燃えよる。あれ怖かったね。そういうのはやっぱり、印象では残ってる」

現代、山火事は稀なものになっている。消防団は新しい消火器具を使い、新しい制服を着る。そして今の占部団長は若い団員ではなく、岡垣町消防団の経験豊かな団長である。

団長になることを望んでいたか、団員の時に団長になれるかなと思ったかと聞いたら、占部団長は強く否定する。

made up of members of the community. Unlike employed fire-fighters, who specialize in fire services and fight fire for a living, members of the Local Fire Brigade work on a volunteer basis, juggling full-time jobs and personal lives with their brigade duties. As a member of the Fire Brigade, the

Commissioner tells me, one must always be ready and willing to drop everything and fight fire when the call comes.

「その時にね、自分も経験がなかったせいもあるけど、山火事でね、とにかく怖かった」

When I ask the Commissioner if this lifestyle is tough, he responds at once with, “It is. It’s definitely tough.” The Commissioner often has to sacrifice his own time to perform his duties, and when he was younger he sometimes got very little sleep. He jokes that his special skill is his ability to sleep at any time or place necessary.

After all, fire-fighting is not and never was an easy task. And back when the Commissioner was still a young brigadier, around the end of the Showa era, fire-fighting was a whole different beast.

“There were more fires back then,” the Commissioner remembers. People still used fire in their daily lives for boiling rice and heating baths, and fire engines, hoses and other fire-fighting tools we take for granted today were not yet in use. There were more house fires, field fires…

And mountain fires.

“At the time – maybe it was partly because I was still inexperienced, but those mountain fires were scary,” the Commissioner recalls.

Back then, there were very few ways to get water directly to a mountain fire. Collecting water from the nearest river and bringing it to the site of the fire was a task in itself, and there were often times when they had to try and put out the fire without any water at all.

“So we’d be putting the fires out with, you know, with brushwood, things like that. And sparks fly really easily in mountain fires. These were bamboo forests, and bamboo leaves, they just burn up. Bam-bam-bam, like that.

“And then you’d glance behind you, and the fire would have gotten there too. That was scary. That sort of thing, that left an impression on me.”

Nowadays, mountain fires are rare. The Fire Brigade uses new fire-fighting tools, and wears a new uniform. And Urabe Chikara is no longer a young brigadier, but the experienced Commissioner of the Okagaki Fire Brigade.

When I ask him if becoming Commissioner was some thing he had hoped for or something he thought he might end

「まさか団長をするとなるとなっていてなかったね」と言う。

それどころか、団長になれと頼まれた時、断った方がいいと思ったそうだ。当時の占部団長はまだ分団長で、上に何人かの副団長がいた。消防団で分団長が副団長を飛び抜かして団長になる前例がなかった。

「私より経験の長い人もおっただしね。…最初、持てるかなと、出来るかなと思ったけどね。気が弱いから（笑）」

そこで考える時間をもらい、占部団長が分団長になるまで団長として勤めて、よくコミュニケーションを取っていた元団長のところに相談に行った。

「そしたらね、」と団長が微笑んで言う。「怒られました」

占部団長が元団長に自分が団長の仕事がちゃんとできるかなという不安を打ち明けたら、「おまえはなんということ言うか！」と怒られました。「俺（元団長）がお前を選んでいるのに、お前がせんなら誰がするか！しっかりせえ！」

それでも占部団長は不安だったから、ちょっと考えさせてくださいと言って帰った。しかし、元団長の言葉は頭に残っていた。そして2005年の4月、占部団長は岡垣消防団長の任務を引き受けた。団長に就任して今年で11年目である。

「ちゃんとサポートしてくれる人がおるから。一人では何もできないからね。何の仕事もそう。やっぱりみんなで協力し合っていかなと」と団長。

もしかして、インタビューの始まりにコミュニケーションが一番大事だと言っていたことで既に明らかになっていた団長の考え方が周りの人からの尊敬を呼び、今までの実績の元にあるものではないだろうか。

up doing when he was a brigadier, he emphatically demurs.

“Never thought I’d become Commissioner,” he says.

In fact, when he was first asked to become Commissioner, he thought he should turn the offer down. At the time, the Commissioner was still a Section Chief, and there were several Vice-Commissioners above him in the ranks of the Fire Brigade. It was unprecedented for a Section Chief and not a Vice-Commissioner to be asked to step into the position.

“There were people who had more experience than me. ...At first I wasn’t sure if I could do it, if I was capable enough. I’m faint of heart,” the Commissioner says with a laugh.

So he asked for some time to think, and went to a former Commissioner with whom he had often spoken during his time in service, and asked his advice.

“And when I did,” says the Commissioner with a smile, “I got scolded.”

When Urabe Chikara told the former Commissioner of his uncertainty about his ability to adequately fulfil the position of Commissioner of the Fire Brigade, the former Commissioner exclaimed, “What the hell are you saying?! You’re the one I chose for the job – if you don’t do it, who will? Pull yourself together!”

Commissioner Urabe, still uncertain, asked for more time to think. But the former Commissioner’s words stayed with him. And so, in April of the year 2005, Urabe took on the role of Commissioner of the Okagaki Local Fire Brigade, a role he has served in for eleven years now.

“It’s because I have people who support me,” the Commissioner says. “You can’t do anything on your own. It’s the same with any job. Everyone’s got to work together.”

And perhaps it is this way of thinking, evident from the very beginning of the interview when Commissioner Urabe told me that communication was the most important part of his job, that earns the Commissioner the universal respect he receives, and enabled him to get to where he is today.



消防団のマーク

国際交流員とは

初めまして、岡垣町役場で国際交流員として勤めているステファニー・チャンです。生まれ育ちはオーストラリアのメルボルンで、今は岡垣町で国際交流の事業に励んでいます。岡垣町の住民についてもっと知りたい、そして岡垣町の魅力を英語圏の人達にも伝えたいという思いでこの英語と日本語のニュースレターを始めました。よろしく願います！

What is a CIR?

Nice to meet you! I’m Stephanie Chan, Okagaki Town Hall’s CIR, or Coordinator of International Relations. I was born and raised in Melbourne, Australia, and am currently working on projects to encourage international exchange in Okagaki. I started this newsletter, *OKAGAKI NOZOKIMI*, in the hopes of learning more about the residents of Okagaki, and of providing English speakers with a way to learn about Okagaki’s appeal. I’ll be in your care!