

Namie Police NEWS

Relentless Efforts for Safety and Security

Namie Branch, Futaba Police Station

Overcoming the Disaster, Supporting the Community

Thirteen years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident. Team #4 of our Journalism School visited the Namie Branch of the Futaba Police Station and interviewed about the state of Namie Town during the disaster, the struggles faced by police officers, and their current duties. What we saw was their unwavering determination to protect the community's "safety and security" while overcoming the hardships of the disaster.

Namie Town, home to Ukedo Port, a well-known base of fisheries such as olive flounder, suffered significant human losses due to the tsunami during the Great East Japan



Our experience with forensic investigation

Earthquake. Particularly shocking was the police response during the disaster, where it is reported that three officers from the Futaba Police Station lost their lives or went missing. One of-

icer who was swept away by the tsunami has still not been found. Even officers from the Namie Branch, who were off-duty, rushed to guide residents to safety from the tsunami, and tragically, some of them did not return.

Following the nuclear accident that occurred afterward, both the local residents and the police officers were thrown into extreme confusion. Mr. Hikaru Koji, who was in charge of investigations at the Namie Branch at the time (currently working at the Fukushima Prefectural Police Headquarters), recalls, "We honestly didn't know what to do." Initially, Mr. Koji, who was a detective, helped guide evacuees fleeing the tsunami, but he describes the response to the nuclear accident as especially challenging.

Due to the national evacuation order, the police officers stationed at the Namie Branch had to relocate. About 30 officers moved to the Tsushima police substation, which was outside the evacuation area. The small substation became overcrowded with officers. In the towns where residents had vanished, thefts became rampant, and Mr. Koji



Officers at the Namie Branch of the Futaba Police Station practicing the arrest of a suspect using a sasumata (forked spear)

and his colleagues were overwhelmed with responding to the situation. He says that there were even times when they traveled as far as the Kanto region to catch criminals. "If we had been more aware of the impact of natural disasters, we might have been able to save more people," Mr. Koji reflects, still questioning himself more than 13 years later.

We observed training exercises using a "sasumata" (forked spear) and forensic investigations, witnessing the daily routines of police officers. The officers were very serious and prepared for any situation. Behind their sharp gazes, there was a strong determination to protect lives and maintain public order.

Disasters, crimes, and other incidents may always be lurking close by. Our "safety and security" are built upon the relentless efforts and sacrifices of these individuals.

At the Namie Branch of the Futaba Police Station, there was a base for the "Ultra Police Squad," a special task force seconded from police departments across Japan to assist with the recovery efforts in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident.

One of the squad members, Mr. Hiroataka Kudo (29), was assigned to the Fukushima Prefectural Police in April this year after being seconded from the Imperial Guard Police, which protects the Emperor and other members of the Imperial



Mr. Kudo (foreground) getting into the patrol car for a patrol.

Thorough Patrols and Crime Prevention

Ultra Police Squad Member Mr. Hiroataka Kudo (29)

Seconded from the Imperial Guard Police to the Fukushima Prefectural Police

Household, where he had been responsible for tasks such as horseback guarding and escorting national dignitaries. "There are still areas where people cannot live. There are people who want to return to their hometowns but can't," he said. He had heard stories from his seniors, also seconded from the Imperial Guard Police to the Fukushima Prefectural Police. "I wanted to do something for the disaster-stricken area," he reflected, feeling a deep sense of purpose. "I'll do my best for the recovery efforts in the affected area."

Signs of recovery are emerging, and evacuees are gradually returning to Namie Town. "Thank you always. It gives us peace of mind, even from a distance, knowing you're patrolling," was a comment Mr. Kudo received from an evacuee who had temporarily returned home. This renewed his resolve, as he said, "I want to support the community to ensure that the progress of revitalization isn't hindered by crime or other issues."

"While capturing criminals is important, I want to focus on thorough patrols and work on deterrence to prevent crimes from happening," he says with determination. "I consider Fukushima Prefecture my second hometown, and though my efforts may be small, I want to do everything I can to support revitalization." Like "Ultraman," he watches over the disaster-stricken area with kindness and strength.

Editor's Note

I used to think of police officers as just public servants. However, through this interview, I came to feel overwhelming respect and profound gratitude. ▶An unprecedented disaster. Even the police officers were thrown into extreme confusion. Amidst this, there were those who went to the scene, disregarding the danger. Some police officers prioritized saving lives and made the ultimate sacrifice. I couldn't stop crying. ▶People with no connection or ties to Fukushima want to help the people, who cannot return to their hometowns. Numerous

volunteers from outside the prefecture join the Fukushima Prefectural Police and actively serve as part of the "Ultra Police Squad." ▶Serving others without expecting anything in return is "paying it forward." I, too, felt the same desire to help people. For the younger generation like us, who did not experience the disaster firsthand, learning about it and sharing it from our own perspective will help support the revitalization. (Sota Ito).



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