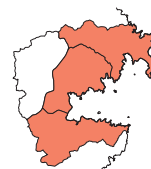


Disaster Flotsam Removal Operation

Getting things looking normal again



▲ Along the side of the road, a soldier in the 4th Division, Ground Self-Defense Force Western Army separating out mementos and items whose owners were identifiable.

Photo courtesy of Ground Self-Defense Force Western Army

After the tsunami, Minamisanriku looked like another world. Debris and flotsam were all over the place. Stuck up high in the branches of the cedar trees along the road were countless bits of flotsam—clothing, pieces of cloth, pieces of plastic sheeting. These would sway in the wind, as if saddened by the loss of the lives people had led. At dusk, when the light got gloomy, these things swayed in an uncanny way, almost like stark symbols of the dire realities the townsfolk were facing. After receiving complaints from residents asking for the flotsam to be removed, the mayor decided to consult the Self-Defense Forces. While the removal of such debris from high places was not part



▲ Mud-covered photos that were sometimes found in the rubble.

Photo courtesy of Minamisanriku Social Welfare Council

of their original disaster relief services, they readily agreed to help. Working by hand, they started to remove individual items from high places in what was known as the Disaster Flotsam Removal Operation. When objects like photos or Buddhist memorial tablets were found, they were respectfully placed on the side of the road.

The people of Minamisanriku continue to feel respect and gratitude for the personnel of the Self-Defense Forces, who, covered in mud, worked so hard and stood by the victims of the disaster.