

## **In Japan**

### **AVIATION AND RADIO IN THE SERVICE OF THE RED CROSS**

Japan is a country where nature is by no means benign and where men are often sorely tried by the violence of the elements; in addition, the configuration and population distribution add further to the difficulties.

Long and narrow, consisting of four main and countless lesser islands of varying size, Japan is known to be afflicted with volcanos and earthquakes. Some of these are of little significance and take place daily, but it happens that these phenomena sometimes occur with devastating force without warning, the consequences being disastrous.

The sea too is dangerous, not only because of typhoons, but also because of its currents, its reefs, and especially its tidal waves, when huge walls of seawater smash their way inland, destroying everything in their way. Every day, ships are in distress and bathers in danger.

In summer come the typhoons, beating the tropical seas to fury and sweeping away trees and houses over vast areas of the land. In their wake, harvests are utterly destroyed. With it the wind brings rain, torrential rain, swelling the rivers and bringing all traffic to a standstill. Snow too is abundant, particularly in the north and north-west of the country and sometimes falls so rapidly that cars and trains are forced to a stop and are blocked in out-of-the-way places until help arrives to free them.

In order to bring assistance as quickly as possible to populations stricken by natural disasters, in places which are isolated and difficult of access, the Japanese Red Cross has set afoot two relief services, each of which is unique of its kind: a flying corps and a radio service.

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At the beginning of 1963, a private civilian organization, the Japan Flying Association, volunteered its services to the Japanese Red Cross. The National Society immediately accepted this generous offer and after several months' study and preparation, the "Red Cross Flying Service" was inaugurated on November 3, 1963.

At the beginning there were 14 volunteers; there are now 18, all of them civilian pilots and nearly all of them flying instructors for the Association. According to the law, they are obliged to do a certain number of flying hours each month and rather than undertake aimless trips, they desired the flying hours they spend in practice to be of some use to the public in general; hence their offer to the Red Cross. In addition, they are ready to take to the air any time their services may be required by the Red Cross.

For this purpose, the Association maintains three or four of its aircraft in constant readiness for take-off. It has various types of aircraft, namely: Cessna, Piper-Pacer, Aeronca, Moram-Saulnier. When the Association receives the "action stations" from the Japanese Red Cross headquarters in Tokyo, all that need be done for these private planes to become Red Cross aircraft is to fix the red cross emblem on the wings and fuselage, whereupon they are ready to carry out their humanitarian missions.

When the Red Cross Flying Service started operating it had its base at Fujisawa airport, 30 miles south-west of Tokyo. Its base has since been transferred to Ryugasaki aerodrome, 30 miles north-east of Tokyo in the Ibaraki prefecture. Under the terms of various contracts signed during the planning period, the Red Cross aircraft may land at almost every aerodrome in Japan.

The main functions undertaken by the Red Cross aircraft are: transport of sick living in places which are isolated or cut off; transport of medical supplies, particularly blood for emergencies; and patrolling areas where people are in danger as a result, for example, of natural disaster or for any other reason<sup>1</sup>.

These patrols are very important, for it is often on the basis of the observations made by the pilots that the central headquarters

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<sup>1</sup> *Plate*: Aviation in the service of the Red Cross, above the beaches and in the mountains.

of the Japanese Red Cross in Tokyo can decide what type of assistance is required in regions affected by disaster.

At present a study is being made of the possibility of flying complete teams of relief workers (doctors, nurses, secretaries) to the islands or to isolated places. Difficulties however are by no means inconsiderable and have not yet been solved.

Readers will undoubtedly be interested in some examples of activities carried out by the Red Cross Flying Service.

When Niigata was ravaged by an earthquake in June 1964, responsible officials of the Relief Section of the Japanese Red Cross Headquarters flew from Tokyo to the scene of the disaster in a Red Cross plane. From their on-the-spot observations, it was realized that the population's most immediate need was light. Instructions were immediately issued and on the very same day other aircraft brought into Niigata one and a half tons of candles. These were parachuted to the Red Cross Centre of the Niigata Prefecture, which immediately distributed them to the victims, hospitals and the town hall. In the days following, the aircraft transported other relief material such as clothing, food, etc.

In January 1965, a huge fire broke out on the island of Oshima, at the entrance to Tokyo Bay, about 62 miles south of the capital. A seriously wounded victim who could not be treated on the island was evacuated by a Red Cross plane to Tokyo.

In June 1965, the Yonago hospital in the Tottori Prefecture in the Japan Sea needed blood of the RH-negative type for an urgent surgical operation. This rare type of blood could not be obtained locally. It was brought by plane from the Japanese Red Cross Central Blood Bank in Tokyo, a journey of almost 375 miles.

In July and August of 1964 and 1965, when sea bathing was at its height, the Red Cross aircraft were almost continuously on patrol above the very crowded beaches within easy reach of Tokyo. It not infrequently occurs that swimmers are carried out to sea by currents or that sailing boats are capsized, unobserved by the people on the beaches. In the summer of 1965 eighteen people in peril were spotted by these Red Cross aircraft which flew low enough to drop life-buoys and give encouragement and instructions through loud-speakers before calling upon and, again by loud-speaker, guiding life-boats or fishing vessels in the vicinity. All

these people were saved. In addition, the planes made several sorties to trace fuel oil pollution by ships, which might have endangered swimmers. In carrying out these missions in the course of the summer of 1965, the Red Cross aircraft logged over 250 flying hours.

From the summer of 1966 onwards, the aircraft will carry out similar patrols in other regions of the country where they appear necessary. The Japanese Red Cross is already preparing for these operations.

The present ambition of the Japan Flying Association is to be able to operate a mountain rescue service for mountaineers and skiers, as in Switzerland. Experience is lacking however, so it would be imprudent for the Association to launch out into such a venture. It would like to send some of its members to Switzerland for training, but this is beyond its means.

The selflessness and spirit of these pilots who, in a few months of often dangerous activity have already saved a number of human lives, command admiration, and their sole aim is to increase their contribution to the Red Cross cause and their service to those in peril.

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The Japanese penchant for and skill with such appliances as telephones, cameras and wireless is well known, and many are the radio enthusiasts with their own transmitting and receiving sets. For a long time they have had their own association, the Japan Amateur Radio League which, in 1957, offered to serve the Japanese Red Cross.

The Japanese National Society itself has several transmitting and receiving stations: one at the Tokyo headquarters and nine others in various provinces, two of which are mobile. Each one has its own petrol-driven power unit. The maintenance of these stations is done by members of the Radio League.

There is no continuous monitoring service. In case of need the members of the Radio League can be called upon to man their stations as soon as possible. In Tokyo, despite its enormous size, it is reckoned that the Red Cross headquarters station can be ready to operate within half-an-hour of call-out.

The system is very simple; it does not require an exacting service of the members in addition to their normal work, and yet it is efficient. There was an excellent example during the Niigata earthquake in 1964, which was mentioned above. When this disaster occurred at about one o'clock in the afternoon, strong earth tremors were felt even in Tokyo. The Red Cross central headquarters immediately gave the alert to the Amateur Radio League, but some members were already on their way to take up their stations, so that in very little time they were ready to operate. At Niigata itself, where the telephone system was disrupted, the Radio League members went on their own initiative to the local Society headquarters. It took them some time to get there, for the streets were caved in (in some places motor cars disappeared into the yawning rents of the surface) and the bridges had collapsed. However, by the end of the afternoon they were able to transmit—several hours ahead of the press and government radio services. On that day the newspapers and government offices depended on the Red Cross in Tokyo for information.

The question of maintaining a continuous monitoring service has been considered. One psychological factor shows this to be unnecessary: amateur radio enthusiasts on the air are voluble. In Japan, there are always some conversing at all hours of the day and night. If something happens in their neighbourhood, a fire, an earthquake or train accident, they immediately relay the news to their far off correspondents.

Consequently news spreads quickly and when received in Tokyo, the Red Cross headquarters is soon informed and can take whatever action is required.

In this way the Japan Amateur Radio League is remarkably efficient with a very simple organization, thanks to the dedication of its members and their desire to serve.

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