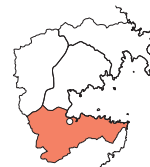


The Tsunami Came from the Mountains

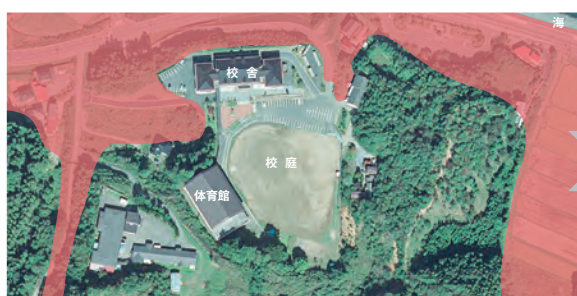
Minamisanriku Togura Junior High School



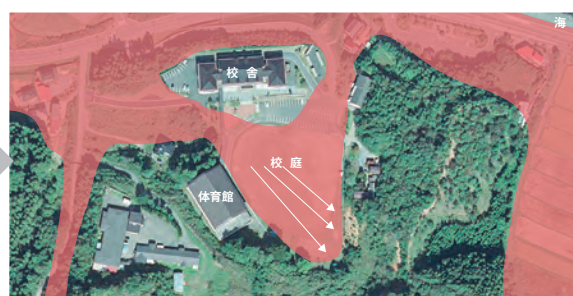
▲ The tsunami waters almost reached the ceiling of the gymnasium at Togura Junior High School. People who had been in the schoolyard ran for their lives up the hills, scrambling up the steep inclines, from where they witnessed many other town residents being swept away.
Photo courtesy of Suto Seichi

Togura Junior High School, which was one of Minamisanriku's designated evacuation sites, was located on a hill about 20 meters above sea level. With the severity of the main shock and repeated strong aftershocks, it was felt that the school building and gymnasium presented a danger in terms of falling objects and potential collapse. Students and local residents left the buildings and assembled in the schoolyard outside.

Around 3:25 p.m., the tsunami hit the Togura district. The water approached from the hills to the left of the school building rather than only from the ocean. Neither the students nor the residents expected this because the left side of the school building was close to high ground and quite a distance from the sea. The tsunami reached 22.6 meters in height, swallowing up the first floor of the school building and the gymnasium and destroying the corridor that connected the two buildings. A teacher and a student lost their lives, together with a large number of local residents. Upon reflection, residents say that the outcome would have been even more catastrophic had they moved into the gymnasium to avoid the cold. In Minamisanriku, the tsunami flooded 34 of the 78 designated evacuation centers and evacuation sites (including Togura Junior High School) that had been determined in the town's disaster-prevention plan, killing many people.



▲ The tsunami, which was expected to approach from the sea that lies to the right, also rushed in from the side of the gymnasium, which is on the left and some distance from the sea.



▲ Local residents and students, who had evacuated to the schoolyard, dispersed and ran toward the steep hillsides at the back of the schoolyard. Not all survived.