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Comments on Japan and the Republic of Korea (15 Feb. - mid-July, 1951)

by Barney Fraser

Interview conducted by Judith Spiegelman

on (date??) at UNICEF headquarters, New York

Fraser: My name is Bernard Fraser. I was the UNICEF representative in Tokyo for Japan and the Republic of Korea from February 1951 to early July of 1951. The two books which I left with the Historical Project at UNICEF headquarters last week were given to me by the Ministry of Health and Welfare near the end of my sojourn in Tokyo. They show photographs of UNICEF's feeding activities in Japan. The first photograph shows Ms. Margarita Strahler who preceded me. She set up the activities and near the end of tenure she was feted by some 13,000 children at a Thanksgiving party in Tokyo. Ms. Margarita Strahler was the daughter of the Swiss Consul-General in Tokyo and lived there during the War. When I took over . . .

Spiegelman In 1951?



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Fraser: She organized the activities of feeding whenever they began. I can't tell you off hand. Probably in 1949. And so when I came on the scene it was merely to receive more thanks. Everything was running smoothly and the Japanese were most thankful for the things that we had done for them. They also knew that there is no free lunch and that you have to thank people and make up for it in some way and they did: They made their first contribution while I was there. In fact, my tasks in Japan were not so much to look after the immediate needs for their own children which were routine, but to start a new phase of relationships.

Spiegelman: So it was running smoothly?

Fraser: It was running very smoothly and nearing its end. While I was shown these pictures as the UNICEF Representative, I worked as such was more in regard to the Japanese contribution which came in the form of processing \$500,000 worth of raw cotton from the US into cut cloth. It was the labor which was the Japanese contribution and it was valued at \$221,000. This entailed a great deal of details of a technical nature, and I had the valuable assistance of experts in the military command and of some on the Japanese side.

Spiegelman: What was the cotton to be made into?

Fraser: Cotton cloth. Cotton cloth which would then be used by the recipient to make their own clothes.

Spiegelman: They took on processed cotton? Some of us don't know what cotton goes through.

Fraser: They took raw cotton.

Spiegelman: Raw cotton was sent from the United States.

Fraser: And the Japanese processed it into bales and bales of cotton cloth.

Spiegelman: And they have to shrink it or sanitize it . . .

Fraser: No. I do not remember what they had to do. The mills took over. But before the Japanese took on the job, they wanted to know exactly how many pounds of cotton there were, for instance, because it loses some weight.

Spiegelman: Could I ask you, then what did UNICEF do with these yard goods of cotton.

Fraser: This process was involved and the main job was to make certain that there would be no confusion or complaints later. The Japanese were aware that this was their first contact with the United Nations as the donor. They wanted to make it a perfect job.

Spiegelman: They wanted to make it a perfect job?

Fraser: Yes. So the end result was that they did perform an outstanding job. No complaint was ever made. The intention had first been to ship this cotton cloth into various Asian countries but later that was changed and all the cloth went to the Government of the Republic of Korea.

Spiegelman: Which was then in the middle of the Korean war?

Fraser: Yes. The Korean cease-fire started in July of 1951, shortly after I left. The cease-fire dragged on and was violated, and there was no armistice until 1953. The cotton cloth was shipped to Korea through the United Nations military command. In Korea it was distributed through the Ministry of Welfare.

Spiegelman: -So we now have the Japanese cloth being distributed in the Republic of Korea during the cease-fire. Was it then to be made into the local cloth?

Fraser: Well, locally it was then distributed for whatever purposes were needed. Cloth for dresses or cloth for this or that.

Spiegelman: Was that particularly important? Were there particular hardships? Had the War meant great hardship?

Fraser: I would think so because the order to divert the cotton from other Asian destinations to Korea demonstrated the need for this cloth in Korea. The main point I want to make here is that the Japanese contribution was its first participation other than as a

recipient. In the course of these details I had any number of contacts with the Gaimusho (which is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and I think I may have been the first one because to visit the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at their headquarters I have the impression that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs people were very much surprised to see a U.N. man come to see them. They were in very cramped quarters. Anyway, I acted as I thought a fund-raiser should because they were making a contribution. So, whereas all these photographs show the UNICEF man participating Thank-you events, I was as busy as a bee on this particular project and on visits to South Korea from Tokyo where I had to see what was happening to the UNICEF plans. I had been told by the Brigadier General in charge of Health and Welfare Activities that UNICEF goods were like "sacks of wheat" as if it were their own. It didn't matter as long as they did not change the UNICEF symbols. Later, I was able to tell the UNICEF Headquarters that the Military Command distributed the UNICEF goods better than we could have done it ourselves as we just didn't have the facilities. UNICEF's aid to Korea and to Japan as well, at that time was small, relatively small, I'd say, but it was symbolic.

Spiegelman: Do you know, Barney, whether children had the habit of drinking milk in Japan and was the skimmed milk something that they knew or did they have to learn to drink? In short, was it a problem for them?

Fraser: From the pictures, I would judge there was no problem. Of course, it wasn't up to me to determine whether milk should be shipped to Japan or we wouldn't have them shipped. Whereas my work in Japan was covering various fields, I didn't really have anything to say about UNICEF's aid there. I was at the tail-end of the operation which went very smoothly. The Japanese were most thankful and expressed their gratitude by their helpful cooperation in processing this cotton (and it went to a neighbouring country that had been occupied by them as if it were a sign of being willing to cooperate in a different spirit.

Spiegelman: Do you have any ball park figure of the value of the cotton or the number of bales that they processed?

Fraser: Well, it was \$500,000 worth of a row of cotton and the Japanese contribution was established at \$231,000 in zen.

Speigelman: And all of that went to the Republic of Korea?

Fraser: Yes. I had some contacts with the U.N. Association in Tokyo, and Mr. Kusama, then the Director, was very interested in our aim. He had been a staff member of the League of Nations. (The U.N. Association established a branch in Osaka and I was asked to come down for the opening of the branch it was a festive affair) where the main figure was Mr. Nantake Sato, who had been Ambassador of Japan and Russia and various other countries. At this time he was also President of the House of Councillors, and I remember that I introduced Andrew Cordier to him when he passed through Tokyo.

Speigelman: Barney, Jack mentioned specifically anything that Maurice Pate had said to you before you left and how he had charged you and how he saw this? For example, whose idea was it to broach a Japanese contribution?

Fraser: Well, that happened before I was sent there. I was in Copenhagen until early February 1951 and I received a telephone call from Karl Borders to be in Tokyo two weeks later. Now, I remember when I was here for a week in New York, I was told not by Maurice Pate but by someone else that if I were to find in Korea that things were not developing properly it would be understandable if I were to become persona non grata. There was no reason to try for persona non grata because, as I said before, things were handled much better than if we had done it ourselves.

Speigelman: I'm trying to understand why they felt you might become a persona non grata?

Fraser: Because if I were to protest too much to the U.N. command for some reason, that would be understandable. They didn't know how things would be working out. In other words, they would encourage me to speak up if things were not right and they would back me up, which I appreciated.

Speigelman: You mean on the distribution side, in the Republic of Korea, once the cotton had already been processed?

Fraser: Not the cotton. I left before the cotton was finally processed. There were other relief activities that UNICEF undertook. UNICEF had also sent other goods, milk and supplies, you will find that in the records.

Spiegelman: Through the Republic of Korea, through the U.N. High Command? I see, and you were in charge of that?

Fraser: Most of these things were arranged long before I got there. The shipments were made and then somebody felt that we ought to see what happens to them, just as I was sent to Copenhagen to see what happened to the \$5 million they had given us over there for the International Tuberculosis campaign. So I was sent to see what was happening to the goods that UNICEF had shipped and I was told that I was to speak up if I didn't find things correct as they should be; if I was a persona non grata, then others would back me up. But there was no need for me to become a persona non grata, as I was accepted by everybody.

Spiegelman: I was interested in one point in whether UNICEF had helped children during the Korean War (you now confirmed that we did send milk and other supplies) but in reading through the UN Yearbooks what came out to me was that there was this other organization-

Fraser: -UNKA-

Spiegelman: -Yes, that it handled such things, and I didn't know that UNICEF had indeed helped children. UNICEF gave it through UNKA?

Fraser: No, not UNKA. At the direction of the Superior Command of Allied Powers of (SCAP), UNICEF supplies were consigned to the United Nations Command and the distribution was handled by the United Nations Civil Assistance Command Korea in the Government of the Republic of Korea.

Spiegelman: So in this case it was only on the Republic of Korea side; we were not helping the Democratic Republic of Korea?

Fraser: No. Jack Charnow tells me that an offer was made to North Korea for assistance but nothing materialized, and that came out recently because I had questions on something in Jack Charnow's memo to Mr. Namazi of 13 March, where he says "I can't recall situations where we were able to provide relief during active hostilities," and I told him that actually UNICEF helped during hostilities in the Korean conflict even though from July 1951 on there was a cease-fire which dragged on to '53. But from the early part of '51 to the latter part of '51-'52 supplies were distributed within the area of war during hostilities by the U.N. command. So that's one instance where UNICEF did help in over-time.

I had one girl at the start, she kept the particulars in record, etc., and I had a driver for the car. They say he was formerly a fire engine driver, and I noticed that whenever he hunched over forward that he would stomp his foot on the accelerator but he was quite a driver. Otherwise I have very few recollections because I had very little chance to get away from my work.