

## **Bonito Fishing Memorial**

A little history is helpful in understanding the reason for this monument to the bonito fishing industry on Zamami Island.

Men from the Keramas were the first in the Okinawa region to start fishing for bonito. Matsuda Wasaburo (1853–1923), a Zamami native who also served as village headman, pioneered the business in 1895 by getting bonito fishermen from Kagoshima and Miyazaki prefectures in southern Kyushu to train the local fishermen. He acquired a fishing boat and went into business for himself in 1901.

This worked out so well that by the 1910s, the islanders had 11 ships, 10 bonito fishermen's associations, and 10 factories. Almost all the men on the island were involved in the fishing, while the women worked in the factories that produced blocks of dried bonito used to make *katsuobushi* (bonito shavings), the common basis of soup stock. The *katsuobushi* business led to a dramatic improvement in the fortunes of the islanders. For example, all the children on Zamami were able to attend primary and secondary schools at a time when that was still extremely rare in the rest of Okinawa.

Matsuda expanded the business until dried bonito shavings became the second-largest industry in Okinawa Prefecture after sugar. At the dawn of the Showa era (1926–1989), however, the fortunes of the business reversed suddenly due to a decline in fish stocks, typhoon damage, and collapsing prices caused by the global recession. With the encouragement of the prefectural government, the fishermen of Zamami expanded their fishing grounds to the islands of the South Sea mandate (Palau, the Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands), and thereby managed to secure good catches and make a living despite the scarcity of fish. The industry was interrupted during World War II, when the boats of the fishermen were first requisitioned by the Japanese military, then destroyed by US air raids. Bonito fishing from Zamami did resume after the war with the purchase of larger fishing boats. Various problems, however, including a lack of men to crew the boats, brought the business to an end in 1976.

This memorial dates from 1922, when the bonito fishing business was still at its height. The front face reads, "Memorial to the Heroic Founders of the Bonito-Fishing Business." On the

other faces are the names of the people who contributed funds, the names of the people (including Matsuda) who built up the industry, and a history of bonito fishing on Zamami.