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Introduction

Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need for arsenals and forts.

"The Arsenal at Springfield"
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1845

For many Japanese and Americans, Okinawa still brings to mind the last and worst battle of the Pacific War. The eighty-two days of bitter fighting with massive casualties on both sides, the kamikaze airplane attacks on American ships offshore, and the ritual suicides of Japanese senior commanders just before U.S. forces occupied the last stretch of ground on the island's southern tip in late June of 1945 are all horrifying memories of the war's final phase. In Japan, historical accounts and dramatic portrayals of these events appear regularly in print and on film. Although the Battle of Okinawa receives less attention in the United States, high school textbooks recount it at some length, and veterans who survived it are still interviewed by newspaper and television reporters at each anniversary of this murderous confrontation.¹

Fewer Americans and Japanese outside Okinawa Prefecture remember that of the more than 230,000 who died in the fighting, over 147,000 were local residents, about one-third of the prefecture's wartime population.² Okinawa conscripts served and

¹ Members of American veterans' groups opposed the 1969 reversion agreement because they felt the United States should retain territory that was acquired at the cost of such enormous casualties.

² Figures cited are from Okinawa Prefectural Government, "Heiwa no ishiji" (Monument of peace) (Naha, Okinawa, 1995). (All Japanese-language sources cited herein were published in Tokyo unless otherwise indicated.)

died with the Japanese army, which fought tenaciously against advancing U.S. forces. However, thousands of civilians including children were caught in the cross fire or trapped in buildings and caves, where they were killed in machine-gun, flamethrower, and grenade attacks. Many others died when Japanese soldiers ordered mass suicides to stretch dwindling food supplies and forced civilians out of overcrowded caves into heavy enemy fire or shot them down at point-blank range.³ When the "typhoon of steel" finally ended, almost all who survived found themselves destitute or without homes or both. Later, unknown numbers died in the aftermath of battle from exposure, unattended wounds, malnutrition, or illness.⁴ If Japanese soldiers often showed little regard for the lives of local residents during the fighting, there were also reports of U.S. soldiers mistreating civilians held in refugee camps and shooting those who attempted to escape in the weeks after the Japanese defeat before American relocation and relief efforts were organized.⁵

These efforts remained makeshift and piecemeal for some time. Even after the war ended in August 1945, the scale of devastation in Okinawa and its remoteness from Supreme Allied Headquarters in Tokyo hindered the flow of relief. Nevertheless, U.S. forces made the best of what they had during the first months after the battle. They worked long hours on duty and volunteered their time off to distribute canned goods, military fatigues, medicine, cigarettes, and other supplies both as free rations and, later, to compensate for such labor as clearing war debris and driving trucks.⁶ Many relief items came from large stocks brought to the island as supplies for the assault on mainland Japan that was

³ Shinzato Keiji, Taminato Tomoaki, and Kinjō Seitoku, *Okinawa-ken no rekishi* (The history of Okinawa Prefecture) (Yamakawa, 1980), pp. 213-221; and Ienaga Saburō, *The Pacific War (Taiheiyō sensō)*, translated by Frank Baldwin (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 198-199. See Jo Nobuko Martin's novel *A Princess Lily of the Ryukyus* (Shin Nippon Kyōiku Toshō, 1984) for an excellent firsthand account in English of the Battle of Okinawa from the perspective of a high school student conscripted as a nurse.

⁴ M. D. Morris, *Okinawa: A Tiger by the Tail* (New York: Hawthorn, 1968), p. 39; and George Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1958), p. 472. Considering Kerr's sharply critical account of the early phase of the American occupation, I cannot share the narrator's view in *Cocktail Party* that this book "was written to justify U.S. foreign policy" (see p. 37).

⁵ Shinzato, Taminato, and Kinjō, p. 223. Americans I interviewed in 1985 who were stationed there shortly after the battle reported incidences of rape.

⁶ Morris, pp. 55-57.

anceled after the Japanese surrender. People in Okinawa do not have pleasant memories of living in army tents, eating K-rations, and drinking powdered milk, but these early arrangements saved tens of thousands from starvation and disease.⁷ Late in 1946 conditions had improved to the extent that the American military could assist in the repatriation and resettlement of more than 112,000 people to Okinawa who had been living on the mainland or in the Philippines, Saipan, and other areas formerly under Japanese control.⁸

Aside from subsistence measures, however, little was done to rehabilitate the local economy for the next three years. During this time Okinawa acquired its nickname "the rock" among American military personnel who considered it a bleak and isolated outpost. Many were "dumped" there because they had been found incompetent or unfit for duty elsewhere; and, not surprisingly, crime and corruption involving American soldiers were widespread on the island. A visit of army officials from Washington in 1949 resulted in a high-level shake-up of the local command.⁹ After that Okinawa also began to receive more of the substantial economic and technological aid that was already flowing into mainland Japan and occupied areas of Western Europe. The U.S. government continued to give military needs priority, but its agencies started providing long-term assistance ranging from agricultural commodities to college scholarships. In addition, Congress allocated limited annual subsidies to the local economy for the remaining years of the occupation.

While humanitarian motives played a part in these later programs, U.S. policymakers also undertook them in Okinawa and elsewhere with a view to political and military advantages in a "postwar" world of intensifying hostilities. If the decision to invade the island in 1945 resulted from its strategic location on Japan's "southern flank," the decision four years later to rebuild the commerce and transportation infrastructure had much to do with U.S. desires for a secure bastion from which military power could be projected over a wide area of Asia. The strategic value of Okinawa under U.S. control was outlined in a report entitled

⁷ Ibid. Also see Higa Mikio, *Politics and Parties in Postwar Okinawa* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1963), p. 26, in which the author writes that "as many as 160,098 cases of malaria were reported in 1946, but this disease was gradually eradicated as a result of a U.S. public health program."

⁸ Higa, p. 26.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

"The Ryukyu Islands and Their Significance" prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency for President Truman in August 1948.

1.... Possession or control of these islands, particularly Okinawa, will give the occupying country: (a) an advantage in either defensive or offensive operations in Asia; (b) a watch post to guard the sea approaches to Central and North China and Korea; and (c) a base for air surveillance over a wide area, taking Okinawa as the center.

2. U.S. control of the Ryukyu Islands would: (a) give the U.S. a position from which to operate in defense of an unarmed post-treaty Japan and U.S. bases in the Philippines and other Pacific Islands; (b) obviate the possibility of the Ryukyus falling under the control of a potential enemy; (c) neutralize, to some extent, Soviet positions in the Kuriles, Korea, and Manchuria; and (d) give the U.S. a position from which to discourage any revival of military aggression on the part of the Japanese.¹⁰

A year later the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a confidential directive stating that "it is the policy of the United States to develop and maintain a substantial degree of contentment among the civil population in order to contribute to the accomplishment of military objectives."¹¹ Considerations of long-term military strategy were overriding, too, in the decision to retain U.S. administration of Okinawa after the Allied occupation of mainland Japan ended in 1952 and to prolong it for twenty years more. Forces were initially reduced between 1945 and 1948, but the bastion there expanded rapidly after the Chinese Communists' victory in 1949 and grew again in quantum leaps with U.S. involvement in Korea and Vietnam. Responding to criticism in Japan and elsewhere of American military rule in Okinawa, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles proclaimed that Japan held "residual sovereignty" over the Ryūkyū Islands.¹² However, three American presidents sub-

¹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "The Ryukyu Islands and Their Significance" (August 6, 1948) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

¹¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Draft Directive to Commander-in-Chief, Far East for Military Government of the Ryukyu Islands," July 29, 1949, in *Foreign Relations* 7 (1949): 817.

¹² Kerr, pp. 6-9. This ambiguous term had been included in Article 3 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty to characterize the status of the Ryukyus vis-à-vis Japan. Kerr subsequently notes that Dulles "unexpectedly shifted" the American position in 1956 and "broadly hinted that... the United States might have to reconsider the doctrine of 'residual sovereignty'" if Japan agreed to a peace treaty with the U.S.S.R. that conceded permanent Soviet occupation of the disputed northern islands.

sequently asserted the "military imperative" of "continuing the present status" of Okinawa "in the face of threats to peace in the Far East."¹³ And one of them, John Kennedy, asked "forbearance" of the island's residents.¹⁴

Nothing in Okinawa's long and troubled history can match the devastation of 1945 or the scale of the military presence that has developed there since then. But efforts by outside forces to exploit the island's strategic location for military advantage go back as far as Kubilai Khan's ill-fated invasion of Japan in 1274. In those days Okinawa was an independent kingdom with a language, mythology, and social structure most closely akin to Japan's. When King Eiso refused Khan's orders to provide troops and a staging area for his planned assault, the Mongol emperor sent his forces onto the island and took Okinawan captives back to China. Fortunately, this proved to be only a temporary disturbance. Over the next three hundred years Okinawa grew prosperous, developing cultural ties and a loose tributary relationship with China as well as a flourishing trade with China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. But by the end of the sixteenth century the kingdom became increasingly caught up in a rivalry between China and Japan over, among other things, claims to suzerainty in Okinawa and control of its rich trade. In 1590 Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who had emerged from a long period of civil wars as the military overlord of Japan, ordered King Shō Nei to provide troops and supplies for Hideyoshi's planned invasion of China through Korea. After initially demurring, the king reluctantly sent food provisions to the Japanese forces, which failed to gain a foothold in Korea and withdrew after Hideyoshi's death in 1598.¹⁵

Though spared embroilment in a war between its neighbors, Okinawa now became an object in the conflict among warring factions in Japan over Hideyoshi's succession. When Tokugawa Ieyasu prevailed in the fighting that ended in 1600, he placed Okinawa under the domain of Shimazu Iehisa, the daimyo of Satsuma province in southern Kyūshū, as part of the settlement designed to secure Tokugawa authority over the whole country. Shimazu received the title "Lord of the Southern Islands" and in 1609 sent

¹³ From Joint Communiqués of meetings between Prime Minister Kishi and President Eisenhower (June 11, 1957), Prime Minister Ikeda and President Kennedy (June 22, 1961), and Prime Minister Satō and President Johnson (January 13, 1965).

¹⁴ From "Statement by the President of the United States" (March 19, 1962).

¹⁵ Kerr, pp. 51 and 152-156; and Higa, p. 2.

an army of samurai to assert his own authority in Okinawa. Over the next two hundred years the Satsuma government imposed harsh restrictions and heavy taxes but permitted the kingdom to continue its tributary relationship with China so that the Shimazu daimyo could reap benefits from the still-flourishing trade. With the establishment of Japan's modern state after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the kingdom was finally abolished, and Okinawa was absorbed into the Japanese body politic as a prefecture in 1879.¹⁶

During the last twenty years of Satsuma's authority, Okinawa was visited by naval vessels from England, France, and Russia seeking navigation, landing, and trade privileges. Fearing both the cost of such arrangements and Satsuma's displeasure, Okinawan officials denied these requests as courteously as possible. Then Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived from the United States with a squadron of battleships in 1853. Perry's mission sought not only the right of "sale and barter," but also permission for "the occupation of the principal ports of those islands for the accommodation of our ships of war." Perry also saw Okinawa as a potential bargaining chip if difficulties arose in his efforts to negotiate a treaty of navigation and trade with Japan. He appealed to his superiors in Washington for approval to seize Okinawa as an American "protectorate." He warned that "I should have instructions to act promptly, for it is not impossible that some other power, less scrupulous, may slip in and seize upon the advantages which should justly belong to us." And he claimed that, in any case, such drastic action was "justified by the strictist rules of moral law" considering "the grinding oppression of their [Satsuma] rulers."¹⁷ President Franklin Pierce's advisors promptly rejected what they called Perry's "embarrassing... suggestion." He was told that the president "is disinclined... to take and retain possession of an island in that distant country" in view of "mortifying" choices the United States might face "if resistance should be offered and threatened."¹⁸ Though thwarted, Perry's plans to occupy Okinawa and build a naval base there foreshadowed what happened a century later, after World War II, not only because they were inspired by Okinawa's strategic location and a desire to

¹⁶ Kerr, pp. 157-169.

¹⁷ From letters of Commodore Perry to the Secretary of the Navy dated December 14, 1852; December 24, 1852; and January 25, 1854. Quoted in Kerr, pp. 305 and 327.

¹⁸ From letter of the Secretary of the Navy to Commodore Perry dated May 30, 1854. Quoted in Kerr, pp. 327-328.

preempt what were thought to be other powers' designs, but also because they were "justified" as beneficial to the island's residents, who had suffered under Japanese rule.

As Supreme Allied Commander during the occupation of Japan, General Douglas MacArthur emphasized that Okinawa's strategic location made it "absolutely necessary" that the United States "retain unilateral and complete control."¹⁹ However, unlike President Pierce's advisors, U.S. military and intelligence officials seemed little concerned in the late 1940s that Okinawa residents might object to such control. In a conversation reported by George Kennan in 1948, General MacArthur characterized them as "simple and good-natured people" who, having been "looked down on" by Japanese, could now "pick up a good deal of money and have a reasonably happy existence from an American base development."²⁰

MacArthur was evidently informed of the discrimination that people from Okinawa had experienced in mainland Japan. And military construction did provide spin-off income for the island's devastated economy during the early years after World War II. But his statements revealed a condescending attitude that was also expressed with unabashed candor by military commanders who later administered the occupation of Okinawa.²¹ Perhaps after seeing people in a state of destitution who thankfully accepted relief and such jobs as were offered them, U.S. officials were deluded into thinking that local residents would always be grateful for American "protection" and for the kind of livelihoods offered by a military-service economy. Widely held stereotypes of a "simple" and easily accommodated people also help explain why many in the U.S. military refused for so long to believe that growing demands for reduction of the bases and reversion to

¹⁹ "Conversation between General of the Army MacArthur and Mr. George F. Kennan, March 5, 1948," in *Foreign Relations* 6 (1948): 701. General MacArthur's remarks are recounted by Mr. Kennan.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Former commanders of the American occupation of Okinawa stated their opinions in wide-ranging interviews conducted in the 1970s by the U.S. Army Military History Institute as part of the institute's Senior Officers Debriefing Program. In the transcript of an interview on April 21, 1975, Lieutenant General Paul W. Caraway refers to people in Okinawa as "countrified" (Conversation no. 12, p. 7), "tiny little people" (p. 38), and "you boys" (p. 59). Discussing local businesses in his interview of April 29, 1975, Lieutenant General Ferdinand T. Unger said of people in Okinawa that "they just didn't know how to run things" (p. 9) and "they were like babes in the woods" (p. 10).

Japanese sovereignty represented genuine popular opinion on the island.²² Higa Mikio, a political scientist from Okinawa, wrote in 1963 about the risks of such misperceptions.

The description of Okinawans as a docile and submissive people, so frequently used by foreign observers, is not without truth. Undoubtedly it comes in part from the long history of having to interact with stronger peoples around them... But to assume that the basic interests and instincts of this "docile" people can be ignored is to court trouble, as has been discovered by the United States several times in the recent past.²³

One of the first jobs Americans offered people in Okinawa after the Japanese surrender was collecting the enormous stores of weapons and ammunition brought there for the assault on mainland Japan that never took place. Much of this matériel was then shipped to Chiang Kai-shek's forces, who were fighting the Communists in China. After Chiang's defeat, military construction in Okinawa shifted into high gear. The United States was theoretically at peace, but a major conflict of interservice rivalries broke out as units of the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marines vied to build installations outdoing one another in size and comfort on their own chosen sectors of the island.²⁴ Local environmental conditions, particularly frequent typhoons and the lack of deep-water bays, forced the scaling down of plans for a major naval base, but work went ahead on hundreds of other projects. These included installations for launching aircraft, storing weapons, gathering intelligence, and training troops as well as housing and recreation facilities. A number of people impoverished by the battle and its aftermath found employment on these projects or as maids and service workers on the expanding bases. But for many more, base construction meant the sacrifice of their lands and livelihoods to military exigencies.

The expansion of the American bases also gave birth to a sharply bifurcated society on the island. While thousands in Okinawa were still living from day to day in borrowed shelter and eating imported staples, officers clubs and mess halls on the other side of high wire fences sported tablecloths and real silverware. Meals were served there by Philippine stewards in elegant white uniforms, and premium brand Scotch sold for ten cents a glass.²⁵

²² Higa, pp. 8-9 and 91-92.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

²⁴ Morris, p. 61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

With the massive influx of U.S. military and civilian personnel during the Korean War, American, mainland Japanese, and local contractors hired Okinawa residents to build not only headquarters buildings, ammunition depots, and hospitals, but also tennis courts, golf courses, swimming pools, baseball and football fields, bowling alleys, commissaries, schools, and thousands of family housing units in what soon became known as "permbase," the largest complex of American military facilities outside the United States. By the mid-1950s desperate post-battle conditions were a thing of the past, but poverty was still widespread among local residents living outside the American enclaves. A decade later the population of U.S. personnel and their families was approaching 80,000, and "dependent housing areas" were beginning to resemble modest suburbs in the American sunbelt. After years when Okinawa was considered a hardship assignment, these facilities made the island's old GI nickname "the rock" into an ironic anachronism.

To secure space for the bases and their surrounding enclaves, occupation authorities drafted ordinances in 1950 and 1952 that authorized the "renting" at a set rate of what were often valuable tracts of cultivated farm land. To call this "renting" was deceptive, first, because once covered with pavement, tarmac, or gravel, such land—already in short supply—could not be returned to agricultural use.²⁶ Second, no one could refuse to rent his land. Higa Mikio described the consequences of this policy.

By the very nature of its economy and due to the lack of natural resources, Okinawa is predominantly agricultural. To the Okinawans, land is the most cherished possession, as it is the sole means of livelihood to most of them. Their attachment to the land is very strong, and voluntary sales are not common. It is difficult for a dispossessed farmer to obtain substitute land or change his occupation.²⁷

Evacuation orders led to strenuous protests and to criticism in the United States from the American Civil Liberties Union.²⁸ Land seizures sparked some of the earliest mass demonstrations against U.S. authorities in Okinawa. At several sites large groups of

²⁶ Kerr, p. 6.

²⁷ Higa, p. 41.

²⁸ Higashimatsu Teruaki, *Okinawa ni kichi ga aro* (Bases in Okinawa) (Gurabia Seikō Sha, 1969), pp. 64-67; and Akio Watanabe, *The Okinawa Problem: A Chapter in Japan-U.S. Relations* (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1970), pp. 139-140.