



ISSN: 1500-0713

Article Title: Narratives of the Early Stage of American Occupation in Okinawa

Author(s): So Mizoguchi

Source: *Japanese Studies Review*, Vol. XXII (2018), pp. 51-76

Stable URL: <https://asian.fiu.edu/projects-and-grants/japan-studies-review/journal-archive/volume-xxii-2018/mizoguchi-so-narratives-of-the-early-stage-of-american-occupation-in-okinawa.pdf>

FIU | **Asian Studies
Program**

NARRATIVES OF THE EARLY STAGE OF AMERICAN OCCUPATION IN OKINAWA

So Mizoguchi
Rikkyo University

Introduction

On March 3, 1947, Gen. Douglas MacArthur reported to the American press that “the war-ravaged islands of the Ryukyu groups, including Okinawa, are slowly returning to normal.”¹ MacArthur never missed an opportunity to impress on people his achievements and he radiated a self-assured assessment about the American occupation of Okinawa.² Many American servicemen, who were stationed in Okinawa, shared, to a degree, the self-congratulatory opinions of their commander. They believed that “the native Okinawans are genuinely appreciative of the benefits conferred on them by the Americans [and] these include elaborate systems of highways, the reestablishment of the school system, the furnishing of employment and the outright maintenance of the destitute and hungry.”³

The Okinawa people could not deny that under long American tutelage Okinawans achieved social and economic progress.⁴ However, the triumphalism of such history is not always constructed from a shared past. The master narrative induces a selective historical amnesia in relation to specific event that would not fit into the well-organized structure. Influenced by the increasing saliency of studies of subaltern groups, this article attempts to evaluate the positive representations of American relief efforts in postwar Okinawa. Did Okinawans enjoy U.S. administrative control? The purpose of this article is to shed light on this simple question.

Many scholarly works have not fully explored the early stage of American Occupation in Okinawa. Some historians highlight Japan’s fast economic recovery and treat Okinawa as a part of this narrative.⁵ However,

¹ “M’arthur Reports Gains in Okinawa,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1947.

² Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 20–25.

³ “Okinawa Recovering,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1946.

⁴ Mikio Higa, “Okinawa Recent Political Development,” *Asian Survey* 3/9 (1963): 415–426.

⁵ See Theodore Cohen, *Remaking Japan: The American Occupation as New*

they overlook the fact that the early stage of occupation in Okinawa was a time of hardship for the indigenous people and their survival was not guaranteed at all. The new generation of occupation studies could strongly highlight distinguished narratives of postwar Okinawa from those of the mainland.⁶

The poverty in postwar Okinawa was a result of U.S. military operations. The most pressing concern of the islanders was to obtain food. Even before the Pacific War, food production did not achieve self-sufficiency in Okinawa and thus food had to be imported from the mainland of Japan. Tenth Army Headquarters, which was in charge of the American occupation after the battle of Okinawa, knew of this food problem and planned to take care of some 450,000 islanders but food soon became very scarce. This scarcity was the result of the tremendous devastation there. The food situation on the outer islands (where battle-related destruction was far less than on Okinawa) was less serious.⁷ But the battle-related damage to the main islands included not only devastation of fertile land but also loss of most of the livestock and the fishing fleets. One Okinawan recalled that only butter was distributed in his internment camp for a week. Because of this difficulty in obtaining food, the Okinawans sought out the remaining crops such as sweet potato, wheat, barley, and millet under military government supervision.

While the scope of the research field has expanded, there have been few studies to examine a variety of American and Okinawan social and cultural interactions during the years of occupation.⁸ Testimonies of the islanders reveal that the female food seekers were sitting ducks for sexual

Deal (New York: The Free Press, 1987); Arnold G. Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1988).

⁶ See Kensei Yoshida, “Democracy Betrayed: Okinawa Under U.S. Occupation” *East Asian Studies Press* 31 (2001); Yakabi Osamu, *Okinawasen, beigunsenryoshi wo manabinaosu: Kioku wo ikani keisyosuruka* (Yokohama: Seori shobo, 2009).

⁷ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50*, 44–48.

⁸ See Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–65* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Roger Dingman, *Deciphering the Rising Sun: Navy and Marine Corps Codebreakers, Translators, and Interpreters in the Pacific War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009).

assaults.⁹ Regulations prohibited enlisted Americans from having sexual relations with these women but the non-fraternization rule ceased to be binding on the plains where the Military Police (MP) could not monitor individual female Okinawans. The report issued by the Military government concludes that “at the end of the fighting on Okinawa crime was at a minimum,” but testimonies of civilians in Okinawa reveal a different situation.¹⁰ For Filipino troops, the sexual exploitation of the islanders did not always mean just seeking pleasure. Seeing no difference between the Okinawans and the Imperial Japanese soldiers who had occupied the Philippines, these soldiers avenged their homeland on Okinawan women.¹¹

Despite Okinawan’s plights, the military government still emphasized how they helped the islanders to recover from the war-related ruin. However, the credibility of this narrative was highly skeptical even at that time. Some American mass media reported that reconstruction made very slow progress. Diplomatic historians reveal that the Truman administration had debated about Okinawa’s future from the end of the Pacific War to October 1948 when the president approved policy paper, Recommendations with Respect to U.S. policy towards Japan (NSC 13).¹² The policy debate in Washington had left the military personnel in Okinawa uncertain about their mission. A confusing series of flip-flop between the U.S Army and Navy on responsibility for governing Okinawa delayed reconstruction of the island’s infrastructure. In July 1946, the authority there was transferred to Army control. However, this event brought no major change to the Ryukyu Islands.

⁹ See Okinawa ken, *Okinawa kenshi 10* (Tokyo: Gennando Shoten, 1975).

¹⁰ Summation of United State Army Military Government Activities in the Ryukyu Island, No1 (July–November, 1948), Box 13 Miscellaneous Untitled Weekly and Monthly Summations of Various Activities of SCAP 1945–48, Record of the Allied Occupational and Occupation Headquarters, WWII, RG331, National Archives College Park, MD: NACP.

¹¹ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50*, 82–86.

¹² Robert D. Eldridge, *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem: Okinawa in Postwar U.S.–Japan Relations, 1945–52* (New York: Garland Publishing, INC, 2001), 228; Taira Yoshintoshi, *Sengo Okinawa to beigunkichi: “Zyuyo” to “kyozetu” no hazamade 1945–1972* (Tokyo: Hosei Daigaku Shuppan Kyoku, 2012), 41.

Until the president made the decision on Okinawa's future, the Army lacked a grand design to reconstruct Okinawan society.¹³

Although I critically examine the U.S. master narrative, my goal is not to develop an anti-American alternative. U.S. and Japanese historians have re-narrated the American occupation of Okinawa using abundant resources. For example, it became evident that Okinawans preferred the benevolent American image, especially in the case when they contrasted the U.S. soldiers with the Japanese who forced Okinawans to commit suicide instead of surrendering to the U.S. Army. According to a study of the Ministry of Health and Welfare concerning the causes of death of 11,483 children under the age of 14 during the Battle of Okinawa, almost 1 percent of the children died because they had their food taken or were shot by their own army.¹⁴

In the development of methodology such as oral history, however, historians must pay close attention to the analysis of sources.¹⁵ We know that the complexity of historical events is easily simplified or modified in the context of politics. In the case of Okinawa, I cannot ignore the fact that memories and perceptions of the occupation are not a solid whole. The unspeakable memories withheld in Okinawan society coexist with the authentic memories publicly displayed in the survivors' testimonies.¹⁶ Due to the incredible cruelty and shame that the islanders experienced, many people were reluctant to talk about the depressing stories of the American occupation. Since some people have overcome their reluctance to speak of those painful situations, researchers could now develop a more comprehensive picture of what actually took place. Many shameful and cruel things such as prostitution and slaughter also constituted the American occupation.

¹³ Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, *Key Stone: The American Occupation of Okinawa and U.S.- Japanese Relations* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 39.

¹⁴ Masahide Ota, "Re-examining the History of the Battle of Okinawa," in Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Okinawa: Cold War Island* (Cardiff, UK: Japan Policy Research Institute, 1999), 33.

¹⁵ Alessandro Portelli, *The ballet of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

During the early stage of this occupation, antagonism between Japanese and American may have not made sense. The base politics have often highlighted antagonism between the U.S. military and Okinawans. However, this construct was not always immutable. The mass media played an important role in forming the images of occupation. The military bases' mere existence agitated the American occupation of Okinawa during its twenty-seven-years duration.¹⁷ As a result, this article reveals more complex interactions between the U.S. military personnel and the islanders. Using different types of resources such as declassified government documents, newspapers, and testimonies, this research displays the complexity of occupation narratives. After the reversion to the mainland, there was an expansion of testimonies of Okinawans edited by government printing offices, journalists, historians, and others. The purpose of the testimonies was varied. Some of them are to record the memories of Japanese soldiers in the Battle of Okinawa. Others are to report military misconducts by both the Japanese and the U.S. soldiers against the islanders. In this article, I mainly use the testimonies edited by Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education (OPBE). OPBE published its testimonies in order to record war and occupation experiences of ordinary people in Okinawa. All editors of these testimonies are eminent Okinawan historians and scholars.¹⁸

Testimonies are an important source to understand and interpret the U.S. military occupation. However, historians cannot claim their objectivity and impartiality in their editing of what the islander saw and how they felt. Miyume Tanji argues that the stories of suffering and discrimination during U.S. military occupation were accompanied by the politics of protest and resistance against the United States. In her view, the U.S. occupation was more complex than was often described in the stories of Okinawans' abuse and marginalization.¹⁹ I recognized the importance of this argument and admitted that Okinawan editors may tend to homogenize the vanquished vision of occupation, while this article focuses on criticizing the victors' simplified vision. Finally, my research concludes that U.S. master narratives

¹⁷ T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White and Lisa Yoneyama, eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia Pacific War(s)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 97.

¹⁸ Okinawa ken, *Okinawa kenshi 10*, 1095–1115.

¹⁹ Miyume Tanji, *Myth, Protest and Struggle in Okinawa* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

have not fully recognized the gaps between the ideal and the reality of American occupation of Okinawa.

Occupation Plan and War

Before the Battle of Okinawa, the United States had already prepared for military occupation of Japan. By 1943, the U.S. Navy enlisted the help of economists, political scientists, lawyers, and anthropologists as well as men with practical experience in the Far East. The purpose of this group was to collect and organize all the available information on the Pacific islands that the Imperial Japanese military would occupy. The outcome of this research was a number of handbooks of factual knowledge about the North Pacific. Some of these handbooks formed the basis of military planning and operations in the Ryukyu Islands, especially as they became the target of the Tenth Army's invasion.²⁰ The Ryukyuan Handbook covered a wide range of topics about Ryukyuan (Okinawan) society.

U.S. experts on Far Eastern affairs also contributed to the military occupation by offering Army and Navy officers, civil affairs courses. On an experimental basis, the University of Chicago started a civil affairs program for the Far Eastern theater. Five other schools (Harvard, Michigan, Northwestern, Stanford, and Yale) also provided Far Eastern programs. The civil affairs policies evinced idealistic principles, stressing that "an occupation should be as just, humane and mild as possible and that the welfare of the people governed should be the goal of every civil affairs officer."²¹

Moreover, U.S. relief efforts, which Okinawans were amazed by and grateful for during the Battle of Okinawa, represented the U.S. military personnel's high-mindedness. One Japanese woman, who was captured by the U.S. Army, remembers that:

GIs gave us water and food saying that we would not be killed. But, convinced that the water and the food contained poison, nobody touched them. The GI took a bite and a sip to show that they were safe. We, then, ate and drank.²²

²⁰ Clellan S. Ford, "Occupation Experience on Okinawa," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 267 (1950), 176.

²¹ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-50*, 8.

²² Yoshida, "Democracy Betrayed: Okinawa Under U.S. Occupation," 9.

By and large, many Americans showed their goodwill towards the enemy's civilians. Some of them handed out their own rations such as candy, chocolate, cigarettes, and chewing gum to people in spite of instruction by Tenth Army headquarters not to do so. In addition, most captives could survive by depending on the U.S. military government for food, clothing, shelter, and work even as they were forced to live in internment camps under a state of martial law.²³

For the Tenth Army, however, the relief mission was an integral part of the tactical preparation for a direct assault on Okinawa (Operation Iceberg). The assault forces were certain to encounter thousands of Okinawans in the U.S. advance across the islands. To facilitate military operations, the islanders had to be removed from the front lines. Military government planning began on August 15, 1944, when four Army and fifteen Navy civil affairs officers arrived at Schofield on Oahu. The Tenth Army's planners received guidance from the Pacific commander, Admiral Chester William Nimitz. The Nimitz directive contrasted in tone with the military government manual. Admiral Nimitz made clear that "the treatment afforded the islanders would depend on how they behaved."²⁴ At every point, plans for dealing with the islanders had to be further adapted to the plans for fighting the war. The planners expected that the Imperial Japanese Army might have used civilians as a weapon of war. They explored the possibility that the enemy would panic civilians and employ them to hamper U.S. operations. Densely populated areas were regarded as an ideal set-up for such schemes. One of most effective ways to prevent the islanders' sabotage was to send them to segregation points which would cause the least interference with military operations.²⁵ During the Battle of Okinawa, one combat division of the U.S. landing force was in charge of establishing internment camps.

In October 1944, the Tenth Army military government headquarters had prepared lists of supplies and equipment for the future occupation. The planners estimated that the Tenth Army would need to take care of some 450,000 natives who would presumably be rendered helpless and homeless as a result of Operation Iceberg. The mission of civil affairs was to provide

²³ Michael S. Molasky, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa* (London: Routledge, 1999), 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16–20.

²⁵ Civil Affairs Okinawa Operation Book No.2, Box 704 RG389, NACP, 3.

Okinawans with minimum food and shelter, screen out any Japanese military, prevent sabotage, restore law and order under U.S. military rule, to combat disease and maintain health and sanitation, and to begin their rehabilitation as soon as conditions would permit.²⁶

Contrary to the Tenth Army's wariness about meeting a hostile people, the U.S. military found Okinawans passive and cooperative. A military government detachment reported that "they were completely docile in carrying out every order."²⁷ Although the Tenth Army got help from the local people, it had to face enormous problems immediately after Operation Iceberg. For Okinawans and the military government, the most impending problem was food shortages. The tremendous devastation, which resulted from the combination of air raids and ground warfare, disrupted agricultural, fishing, and livestock industries. Most of the crops had been lost during the war as had most of the livestock and fishery. Statistics suggest that almost 90 percent of the livestock was lost and all motorized boats and 70 percent of oar-powered boats were destroyed.²⁸

Nevertheless, Tenth Army headquarters still believed that there was no immediate food crisis because enough food would be provided by their great relief efforts. Moreover, in the southern part of Okinawa, the U.S. soldiers confiscated food from the islanders' meager stores. The military government allowed the islanders to seek out food caches. During the battle, 1,402 tons of processed foodstuffs and 2,079 tons of harvested crops were salvaged and rationed. By the end of the battle, between 75 and 85 percent of the population was fed more from local resources.²⁹

One of the U.S. soldiers who served in the military government recalled that several errors in planning finally illustrated the necessity of a flexible plan. The most striking error was that the Tenth Army headquarters underestimated the number of civilians who were expected to be captured. For invasion purpose, Okinawa was divided into a northern part to be attacked by the Marines, and a southern part to be attacked by Army forces.

²⁶ Ibid., 4–6.

²⁷ Yoshida, "Democracy Betrayed: Okinawa Under U.S. Occupation," 10.

²⁸ Summation of United State Army Military Government Activities in the Ryukyu Islands, No.1, Box 1999 Folder 12, RG 407, NACP., 25–26; Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50*, 47, 133.

²⁹ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50*, 47.

According to this operational categorization, the Tenth Army headquarters computed the number of Okinawans in the north and in the south. It was thought that in the sparsely populated north, relatively few natives would be captured after the Marines moved northward.³⁰ Unexpectedly, the preliminary bombing of southern Okinawa before the battle of Okinawa prompted the Imperial Japanese military to order the islanders to move into the northern part of the island. On October 10, 1944, U.S. B-29 planes repeatedly struck Naha City, the capital of Okinawa prefecture, and burned down 90 percent of the city.³¹ Many islanders who were frightened by the threat of air raids rushed away from densely populated areas.

On April 1, 1945, the Tenth Army started the actual invasion of Okinawa but they soon realized that there was no enemy fire. This is because the Thirty-Second Army lacked the strength to defend the beaches. While the landing operation was timid, the Army units were soon forced to start intense fights with the Japanese Army. At the end of April, the U.S. Army pushed through the first Japanese defense line. On May 29, the Tenth Army captured Shuri Castle. Seizure of the castle represented both strategic and psychological blows for the Japanese and was a milestone in the Battle in southern Okinawa.

On the other hand, the Marines easily reached the northern tip of Okinawa on April 13. The consequence of rapid conquest of the northern half of the island put a greater effort than expected on civilian affairs. The uncontested landing and rapid conquest of the northern half of the island, including 200,000 Japanese captives, put a greater than expected emphasis on logistical efforts. The blueprint for planning had concentrated on construction of airfields, roads, munitions storages and other military installations. The remaining areas had been allocated for the housing and sheltering civilians. The planners had calculated that 12 refugee camps would be built to house some 120,000 civilians, in addition to the military government personnel themselves.³² As it was, engineering teams soon understood that the U.S. military needed more space for military installations and thus no space remained for the captives.³³ Although the construction

³⁰ Ford, "Occupation Experience on Okinawa," 177-178.

³¹ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-50*, 38.

³² *Ibid.*, 55.

³³ Ford, "Occupation Experience on Okinawa," 178.

work in the initial plan supported the tactical forces engaged in the battle of Okinawa, the ultimate goal was to construct the bases and airfields for the final assault on mainland Japan. Engineers had to engage in extra work such as widening roads and bridges due to the poor conditions of roads in rural regions.

Under these adverse circumstances, the military government decided to use the Okinawans' houses as emergency shelters. Some dwellings, which had housed five to 10 people, became shelter for 50 or more. Such overcrowding made sanitary standards difficult to maintain. Many Okinawans have never forgotten their squalid quarters in the emergency shelters. One Okinawan woman remembers that her daughter gave birth to a child in an overcrowded shelter. She had terrible anxiety about cutting her grandchild's umbilical cord with scissors that were covered with mold.³⁴

In the southern parts of the islands, the bloody battle had continued. The battle of Okinawa raged for three months – from April to June 1945 – and resulted in the deaths of approximately 65,000 Japanese soldiers, 94,000 noncombatants, and 12,500 Americans.³⁵ The longer the war was prolonged, the more the U.S. military government moved refugees to the northern areas. Under the strain of the abrupt evacuations from the front lines, the military government sometimes mismanaged refugees. On several occasions, refugees were sent to a new location that had been filled beyond capacity and refused to take them in. For the evacuees, these refusals meant waiting many hours in the back of overcrowded trucks during which time some became dehydrated or ill.³⁶ As a result of the war, approximately 75 percent of the population was dislocated from the area of its original domicile.³⁷ After the suicide of the Japanese Army commander Ushijima Mitsuru, on June 23, 1945, Japan's military resistance largely ceased, and thousands of Okinawans were placed in internment camps. The number of residents in camps had been increasing from the first month of the invasion in April, 1945. By the end of June, it amounted to a majority of the surviving population on the Ryukyu Islands. Most Okinawans wanted nothing more than to return to their homes.

³⁴ Okinawa ken, *Okinawa kenshi 10*, 447.

³⁵ Yoshida, "Democracy Betrayed: Okinawa under U.S. Occupation," 3.

³⁶ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50*, 59.

³⁷ Daniel D. Karasik, "Okinawa: A problem in Administration and Reconstruction," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 7/3 (1948): 264.

Overlapped Experiences: War and Occupation

Scholarship contends that Okinawans have correlated the experiences of the war and occupation with postwar political opposition against the American military bases. What specific stories or memories in the war have been directly linked to the Okinawan community of protest? Interestingly, many scholars do not clearly answer this question, which they themselves posed.³⁸ This is because scholars know that the survivors of the Pacific War have ambivalent feelings toward American soldiers. Many islanders admit that Americans made greater efforts to save Okinawans than did the Imperial Japanese soldiers. Some of them contrasted a benevolent American image with the Japanese one of forcing Okinawans to commit suicide instead of surrendering to the U.S. army. The Imperial Japanese government had educated people to commit suicide instead of surrendering to the U.S. army. Many islanders resorted to acts of desperation: strangling and suffocating their own children, stabbing one another in the throat, and when a grenade was available to expedite the task, huddling around the device and pulling the pin. According to some Japanese captives, they would have surrendered earlier except for fear of their own soldiers.³⁹

While Japanese propaganda proclaimed that the Imperial Army would defend civilians in return for their support of Japan, the safety of Okinawans was given low priority.⁴⁰ As the situation for Japanese forces worsened and morale amongst the civilian populations declined, the Imperial Army issued increasingly restrictive decrees. Okinawans were required to contribute to food levies, wages, and corvee labor to support the war. The violations of these decrees provided the basis for a campaign of selective violence by the Japanese soldiers against the islanders. In some places, the

³⁸ See, Tanji, *Myth, Protest and Struggle in Okinawa*; Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Island of Discontent: Okinawa Response to Japanese and American Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC, 2003); Chalmers Johnson ed., *Okinawa: Cold War Island* (Cardiff, UK: Japan Policy Research Institute, 1999).

³⁹ Molasky, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa*, 16; Newspaper Clipping, *Papers of James T. Watkins IV*, Reel 1, Box1, James T. Watkins Papers, Department of Special Collections and University Archives Stanford, California: DSCUAS.

⁴⁰ Tanji, *Myth, Protest and Struggle in Okinawa*, 38; Hein and Selden, *Island of Discontent*, 48.

Japanese army officers' action had become increasingly paranoid. A Japanese sailor recalled that:

One guy was executed in front of the village chairman and the voluntary guards' leader, for carrying the documents (leaflets?) from the Americans. With his hands tied behind his back, he was lashed to a tree, and two soldiers stabbed him from both sides with their bayonets, but they did not kill him. Lieutenant Kayama dispatched him with a shot to the head.⁴¹

The U.S. military appealed to the local people to stay away from Imperial Japanese Army. U.S. propaganda leaflets, which targeted civilians, cast doubt on waging the war. An Okinawan remembers:

The leaflet, which the U.S. military dropped, said "it would be sagacious to return to your home town and then live calmly. The U.S. military would never attack the civilians." The rumor of leaflet spread among Okinawans who were frightened by artillery strikes. When the next leaflet noticed that the U.S. military would start a mopping-up operation, they decided to surrender.⁴²

Leaflets, which utilized Okinawa's historical, social, and anthropological information from the Ryukyuan Handbook, adroitly focused on the traditional Japanese bias that Okinawans were backward rustics.⁴³ Ironically, the U.S. military government also tended to look down on the islanders as second class citizens during the occupation of Okinawa.⁴⁴ For example, Colonel William S. Triplet wrote in his diary that:

The Surviving natives crept from their ruins and found hordes of Americans driving hundreds of Jeeps, trucks, and

⁴¹ Hein and Selden, *Island of Discontent*, 52.

⁴² Okinawa ken, *Okinawa kenshi 10*, 497.

⁴³ Leaflets during the battle of Okinawa, *Papers of James T. Watkins IV*, Reel 1, Box 1, DSCUAS.

⁴⁴ Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors*, 168.

tanks hither and yon..... Unfortunately, the unsophisticated natives were unable to gauge the speed of an oncoming truck.⁴⁵

Although the U.S. military boasted that the civilians in Okinawa began to cooperate once they lost their fear of Americans, Okinawans gave greater support to the Japanese war effort. Contrary to standard opinion in Okinawa, which holds that the islanders were bystanders, Japanese conscripts might have accounted for up to one-third of the island's defender. Okinawans fought well and their knowledge of local terrain helped their unit during the battle of Okinawa.⁴⁶ Civilians showed their pity for remnants of defeated Japanese troops and distributed food to them when troops assumed a humble attitude toward them.⁴⁷ In some huge internment camps, Japanese soldiers were concealed by the islanders.⁴⁸

Relatively speaking, Okinawans were better fed in the camps than in their old hideouts. In some villages, rations from the Japanese were so poor that infanticide occurred as a way of feeding others. After the war, the severity of food shortages depended on locality. A fortunate woman recalled that:

In my internment camp, the U.S. military supplied us with an ample rationing. Military officers also provide us special rationing such as milk or canned foods.... After I engaged in military chores, our life gradually became well off. In my case, I never experienced food shortage.⁴⁹

On the other hand, another woman suffered from malnutrition in her camp. According to her:

We Stayed at Kushi for 7 or 8 months. At first we lived in a huge tent which accommodated from 50 to 100 people.

⁴⁵ William S. Triplet. *In the Philippines and Okinawa: A memoir, 1945–48* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 207.

⁴⁶ Sarantakes, *Key Stone*, 7–8.

⁴⁷ Japanese troops more often seized food from civilians. Therefore, many Okinawans hated the Imperial army. Okinawa ken, *Okinawa kenshi 10*, 858.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 864.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 447.

Because there was no mat, we slept on the ground. We were literally treated like livestock.... The food situation was also terrible. Although the U.S. military equally distributed foodstuff, ration was not enough to survive. Everyone suffered from malnutrition. I saw many people who died of starvation. So, we had to seek potato for 30 kilometers' distance.⁵⁰

In places where the food situation was aggravated, the islanders often scavenged from garbage or stole food from the U.S. bases. Sly people sold the leftovers of garbage after adding water. The islanders called stolen things the fruits of a battle. Under these conditions, people lost their morality and boasted about their swag.⁵¹

The sexual exploitation of Okinawans by U.S. soldiers was also a common story among the survivors. The military government restrained enlisted Americans from having sexual relations with Okinawans. By the end of 1946, the MP reported 30 cases of rape and attempted rape.⁵² Although it is impossible to know accurate numbers of crimes, the islanders' testimony reveals that the American sexual exploitation of Okinawans was a serious problem. Not just a few women seem to have prostituted themselves for food. One Okinawan told that:

When I was doing potato-digging, one white soldier, who was hiding near me, suddenly lifted me on his shoulder and ran to a coppice. It seemed that he had prepared to engage in prostitution because wheat, cigarettes, and so forth were placed on the ground. Gesticulating with his body and hand, he suggested to me that he give these things.... I gestured that I would take all. Because I was ashamed of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 474.

⁵¹ Yakabe Osamu, "Ekkyo suru Okinawa: Americanism to bunka henyo," in Yoshimi Shunya, ed., *Reisen taisei to sion no bunka* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2002), 249.

⁵² Summation of United State Army Military Government Activities in the Ryukyu Island, No.1, Box 1999 Folder 12, RG 407, NACP, 20.

being seen by someone, I gestured him to move to other place.⁵³

A large number of women were actually raped. According to one newspaper article, as many as 10,000 Okinawans were raped.⁵⁴ One woman witnessed that her niece had been abducted by a white soldier. According to her:

The soldier threatened us with a gun. We could not resist him...After a while, the leader of vigilance visited my home and then he chased the soldier with my grandfather. They pretended to be Military Police officers and shouted that "MP was coming."...They found my niece in the mountain. The soldier had already disappeared.⁵⁵

The islanders' testimonies reveal that women were often raped when they sought food. In some places, only black soldiers were regarded as rapists by both the islanders and MP. An Okinawan negotiated with an MP to supervise black soldiers. The MP started to patrol his village, but black soldiers disappeared during the patrol time and showed up after the MP left.⁵⁶ This reputation for crime and misconduct earned by black soldiers could be traced to the system of segregated units. It is natural that only black soldiers committed crimes in villages where black units were stationed.

The military government understood that "success of occupation depended not only upon the dedication of the civil affairs personnel, but also upon the good behavior of all American servicemen on Okinawa."⁵⁷ U.S. soldiers were expected to behave like ambassadors, whether or not they were conscious of that expectation. Some soldiers showed their goodwill to the islanders. An Okinawan related the following:

I was captured with my son and my brother...My brother, who had stayed in Canada, could speak English. He

⁵³ Okinawa ken, *Okinawa kenshi 10*, 438.

⁵⁴ "3 Dead Marines and a Secret of Wartime Okinawa," *New York Times*, June 1, 2000.

⁵⁵ Okinawa ken, *Okinawa kenshi 10*, 441.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁵⁷ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-50*, 81.

explained to American soldiers that we were civilians. In our camp, we were surprised by the American hospitality. They provided us with a pile of foodstuff and new clothes...When my wife gave birth to our fifth baby, the American soldiers zealously helped to find a doctor. I really appreciated their help.⁵⁸

During the War, the Imperial Japanese government extolled extreme patriotism and prohibited the populace from accessing U.S. media and popular culture. Japanese were even banned the use of the language of the enemy, English. Under these conditions, Okinawans, who returned from abroad, were often regarded as anti-nationalists. They were threatened by the Japanese soldiers and thus many of them were willing to surrender.

Contrary to the military government's expectation, a minority of the troops began to torment the islanders. In the worst cases, slaughtering occurred in some villages. A woman remembers that:

We moved from Momoyama to Henako. Although we often ran into the American soldiers, we did not always feel uneasy about them because almost all soldiers did not torment us. However one lean guy, who was named "civilian," was like a demon. He always carried a gun, beat males, and raped females. Several people were killed by him. One guy was killed in a plain because he evacuated young ladies when civilian came to our village. The civilian forced him to kneel and then shot him.⁵⁹

The Director of General Affairs for the military government, Lt. Comdr. James Watkins IV, noted that "extreme ill will had developed between the blacks and the islanders" and said "fear of cruelty, rape, and violence replaced respect for American authority."⁶⁰ The military government admitted that black troops were by no means the only offenders, but it linked an increasing number of black servicemen and serious crimes on Okinawa. Complaints against black soldiers diminished as many of their

⁵⁸ Okinawa ken, *Okinawa kenshi 10*, 851–852.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 480–481.

⁶⁰ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50*, 83.

units were gradually withdrawn from Okinawa in 1946 and 1947. However, the military government soon discovered that the departure of black soldiers did not solve the problem of civil-military conflict. Indeed, conflict between the islanders and the replacement unit from the Philippines increased. Some Okinawans conjectured that the Philippines avenged their homeland on Okinawans. In fact, many of the Filipino servicemen had experienced, or at least witnessed, atrocities committed by the Japanese in the Philippines during the Pacific War.⁶¹ A demobilized Japanese soldier recalled the following when he returned to Okinawa:

I went back to Okinawa on July 3, 1947. Sometime I visited Moromizato where my relatives lived. Whenever I visit Moromizato, ships had to pass through Koya Zyuziro where a Filipino unit was stationed. Because the demobilized soldiers, wore the same dark-blue trousers, it was quite easy to recognize who Japanese soldiers were. They always reviled and threw something at us. Although they did not shoot us, I was very scared.⁶²

Throughout the two years they remained on Okinawa, the Philippine Scouts were accused of numerous crimes against the islanders. For the period January to July 1948, Koshin Shikiya, the Governor of Okinawa Gunto (Ryukyu Islands), reported 68 violent incidents involving the Philippine Scouts. The Okinawan police commissioner, Kenshin Nakamura, reported that "Since November 1945 four civil policemen had been killed on duty by black or Filipino servicemen."⁶³ Historian and journalist reveal that these reports were wrong. Black and Filipinos, who served there, made up only a part of the occupiers stationed on Okinawa but no one has identified the culprits because the U.S. military officials have not published MP records.⁶⁴

The friction generated between the U.S. military and the Okinawans remained a severe hindrance to reconstruction of Okinawan life.

⁶¹ Ibid, 85.

⁶² Ryuzo Saki, *Kiroku shogen Okinawa Zyumin gyakusatu* (Tokyo: Shin zinbutsu ouraisha, 1976), 185–186.

⁶³ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50*, 86.

⁶⁴ "3 Dead Marines and a Secret of Wartime Okinawa," *New York Times*, June 1, 2000.

Furthermore, the military government did not resolve this problem. Reports of serious crimes continued to plague the military government until the end of the 1940s, when the new government, the U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands, was established. Although the U.S. military's racial policies further exacerbated these frictions, the decline of the soldiers' discipline stemmed from the disruption in the chain of command. Because the Truman administration left the status of the Ryukyu Islands at the conclusion of World War II to the State Department, the Navy and Army proceeded to enact different occupation plans. A confusing series of flip flop between the U.S. Army and Navy on responsibility for governing Okinawa left the American soldiers confused.

The Forgotten Islands

Okinawans as well as ordinary Americans did not know how the political and military clash within the Truman administration affected the occupation of Okinawa. However, the people could infer that the occupation policy did not work well. By 1948, *Uruma Shinpo* was the only Okinawan newspaper left and it was censored by the military government. It reported that Okinawans were gradually getting back to normal life under the military government's tutelage. On August 1, 1947, *Uruma Shinpo* reported the governor's interview with American journalists on the front page. The governor explained to the journalists that the islanders appreciated assistance from the United States. According to Shikiya:

A small number of Okinawans long for reverting to the mainland, but almost all want to economically develop under the American tutelage. Okinawans would die of starvation if the American military left Okinawa. To avoid this, the military should stay for a long time.⁶⁵

Some journalists seemed dubious of the governor's unctuousness. The Deputy Commander for Military Government, Col. William H. Craig, always stayed by the governor and interrupted journalists' questions. For the military government, the governor was "a landmark for progressive self-government" because the representative of local village and city councils elected Shikiya. The official Army history describes that "the evolution of political reforms continued under Army auspices."⁶⁶ However, everyone

⁶⁵ *Uruma Shinpo*, August 1, 1947.

⁶⁶ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-50*, 108.

realized that the governor held a purely nominal status. He had no political power without the military government's permission. Consul General U. Alexis Johnson remembered that when he met the governor, Shikiya explained to him that his job was only to nod and smile at the Americans. An American liaison officer between the military government and the governor was satisfied with Shikiya, because of his docile personality.⁶⁷

The U.S. mass media is often a useful resource for understanding the situation in Okinawa. The information reflected the resident reporters' views. Some articles reported that the islanders had increasing anti-American feelings. On April 1, 1946, the *New York Times* had an article with the caption that "Island's people remain docile but are ready to see us go."⁶⁸ The article summarized their attitude toward the military government like this:

Thank you very much for all you've done for us, but please go away as soon as we are able to stand on our own feet economically. We want to live our own lives, but since we've gotten used to Japanese ways we prefer them.

One of the most severe anti-occupation journalists was *Time* correspondent, Frank Gibney. On November 28, 1949, *Time* magazine published his article which criticized the U.S. military government in Okinawa. According to this article:

The U.S. troops "in Okinawa" whose morale and discipline have probably been worse than of any U.S. force in the world, have policed 600,000 natives who live in hopeless poverty. The battle of Okinawa completely wrecked the islands' simple farming and fishing economy; in a matter of minutes, U.S. bulldozers smashed the terraced fields which Okinawans had painstakingly laid out for more than a century. Since war's end Okinawans have subsisted on a U.S. dole.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Kano Masanao, *Sengo Okinawa shiso zo* (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1987), 81.

⁶⁸ "Okinawans Prove American to Rule: Island's People Remain Docile, but Are Ready to See Us Go," *New York Times*, April 1, 1946.

⁶⁹ *Time*, November 2, 1949.

A report by MacArthur's headquarters in 1949 reaffirmed this reputation, noting that "personnel assigned to the Ryukyu reportedly were 'of lower caliber than those assigned to Japan.'"⁷⁰ The ideal goal of America's mission in Okinawa was to teach the islanders the meaning of democracy. In reality, however, the credibility of this purpose in the early occupation period was less reliable. By the fall of 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) decided that "the Ryukyu Islands were vital and that they were to be considered as one of the primary base areas in American postwar security arrangements."⁷¹ The JCS thus argued that the United States should have exclusive control of Okinawa. However, not many in the Truman administrations were satisfied with this recommendation. The State Department desired to follow the principle of the Atlantic Charter, which declared no territorial aggrandizement, and to keep cooperative and friendly relations with Japan in the context of the growing Cold War. In response to the JCS, the State Department argued that "control of the Ryukyu would involve the United States in the thankless task of governing the three-quarters of a million people of totally alien culture and outlook."⁷² The President, Harry S. Truman was placed in a dilemma between the JCS and the State Department. In his diary, Truman wrote that:

I found that the State Department held views that differed from those of the War and Navy Department. I listened carefully to both points of view. In the end, I sustained the Army and Navy chiefs on the major issues of the security of the bases. But I also saw the validity of the ideal for which the State Department was contending.⁷³

The political deadlock had been gradually dissolving after the Navy modified its opinion. At first, the Navy assumed that Okinawa was desirable as a naval base and thus accepted responsibility for military government. However, after examining the anchorages in Buckner Bay, the Navy finally found these places less desirable than originally thought. In addition,

⁷⁰ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-50*, 81.

⁷¹ Eldridge, *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem*, 83.

⁷² Sarantakes, *Key Stone*, 26.

⁷³ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs, Volume I: Year of Decisions* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1955), 274-275.

typhoons, which devastated the developing ports in the region, clearly made naval interest in the islands decline. Admiral Nimitz recommended a trusteeship for Okinawa. Trusteeship implied that the military government would administer the territory for a limited time. Trusteeship was also useful to camouflage “the unpleasant odor of colonialism.”⁷⁴ The Army compromised on the condition that the United States possess exclusive control over all military installations.⁷⁵

In October 1948, debate about Okinawa’s future was settled for the time being when the president approved policy paper, NSC 13. NSC13 concluded that:

The United States should make up its mind at this point that it intends to retain on a long-term basis the facilities at Okinawa.... The base on Okinawa should be immediately developed. The United States agencies responsible for administering the above mentioned islands should promptly formulate and carry out a program on a long-term basis for the economic and social well-being, and to the extent practicable for the eventual self-support of the natives.⁷⁶

During the political debate, the military government lost its momentum in the occupation. “Military government personnel were uncertain about their mission and purpose.”⁷⁷ Since the military was unsure how long it would stay on the island, it did not repair the damages of war or build permanent buildings that would stand up to typhoons. Even facilities for Americans were not much better. Colonel Triplet describes that:

Housing at Awase was becoming slowly, very slowly, available, and three or four quonset houses would shortly become available to us.... Three lieutenants preferred the housing offered in Awase now to waiting for our

⁷⁴ Sarantakes, *Key Stone*, 26.

⁷⁵ Eldridge, *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem*, 175.

⁷⁶ Revised Paragraph 5 of NSC13/1 (October 26, 1948), *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, Vol. 6, 877–878.

⁷⁷ Sarantakes, *Key Stone*, 28.

construction. I certainly couldn't blame them for wanting to move out. Even since one of these child brides had been awakened from a sound sleep by a rat biting her on the lip, they had shown signs of cracking a bit.⁷⁸

The JCS originally assigned both operational control and military government responsibility for the Ryukyu Islands to the Navy, but neither the Navy nor Army wanted to assume responsibility for the region.⁷⁹ Because the Navy declined an interest in Okinawa, all administrative authority in Okinawa finally was moved to the Army on July 1, 1946. This transfer of command soon affected occupation policies. Although the Okinawans overseas had sent relief items to their native place, the relief transportation, for which the Navy was in charge, was suspended.⁸⁰ The command reorganization coincided with a general demobilization of engineer units in Okinawa. By late spring only four of twelve units were actually engaged in construction activity. The funds available for base construction also dwindled. In February 1946, Headquarters, Army Forces, and Western Pacific, estimated that \$93 million would be needed to build base facilities in Okinawa. However, Congress actually provided only \$31 million.⁸¹ The decline in military construction was worldwide, but the particularly dramatic curtailment of funds for Okinawa reflected the lowered priorities that characterized American policy toward the Ryukyu Islands during the 1945-48 period.

Despite the apathy and neglect among political leaders in Washington D.C., Okinawa slowly recovered from the ruins. The purpose of the military government's economic mission was to provide for the repair and restoration of damaged properties and facilities and to devise a plan for the economic development of Okinawa. First of all, the military government decided to release most of the islander's land so that refugee camps would be dismantle and Okinawans could be resettled into communities. At the same time, 20 percent of the land under cultivation before the Pacific War was confiscated to create military bases. While there was a competition over land between the U.S. officials charged with creating strategic bases and those

⁷⁸ Triplet, *op. cit.*, 214.

⁷⁹ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-50*, 79.

⁸⁰ Nahashishi hensyu iinnkai, *Sengo wo tadoru* (Okinawa: Ryukyu Sinposha, 2007), 44.

⁸¹ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-50*, 78.

assigned to the rehabilitation of Okinawan society, military construction programs finally played the central role of reconstruction of the Okinawan economy.⁸² The most important commercial crop on Okinawa was sugar cane, but Okinawa sugar cane industry did not revitalize until 1951. Other crops reserves on Okinawa were meager as well as the livestock reserves.⁸³ Under these conditions, a great number of the islanders worked as construction workers, grounds-keepers, drivers, domestics, and concessionaries in jobs indirectly but closely related to American military housing and base construction and operation. The monetary economy reinstated in order to pay the wages for Okinawans whom the military government employed on U.S. bases. The black market where the islanders sold their belongings or booty disappeared by the end of 1948.⁸⁴

The military government broadcasted the image that base construction was cooperation work between Okinawans and Americans. Washington Post reported that:

Life is going on among the half million Okinawans. Little by little, they were digging out of the rubble created by man and God – the war and then the typhoon. United States Army engineers also are busy, rebuilding military installations wrecked by the storm. Japs – fast being repatriate – are helping out.⁸⁵

Although many Okinawans were industrious workers, they were not eager to construct the U.S. military installations. Okinawa Times reported that:

Although the people cannot get jobs in their villages, they may get a job related to base construction around Naha City. The youth do not have money to buy cigarettes. Under these conditions, they are attracted by any kind of job.⁸⁶

A primary school teacher remembers that:

⁸² Ibid., 121, 164, 168.

⁸³ Ibid., 124–125.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 144; Nahashishi hensyu iinnkai, Sengo wo tadoru, 20–23.

⁸⁵ “Army Settles Down to Stay in Okinawa,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 1946.

⁸⁶ *Okinawa Times*, June 25, 1951.

My salary was 300 yen per month. In those days, one dollar was 120 yen.... A pack of cigarettes was just 300 yen. My salary was so low that I sold my belongings as haoris (Japanese traditional coats) because Americans wanted to buy those like a souvenir.... Many able Okinawans got a job related to military installations, although salary was not so good.⁸⁷

In sum, many Okinawans engaged in base constructions only to survive. But an insufficient capital flow did not allow the regional economy to fully develop. The emergence of the Cold War and the rise of communist strength in the Far East ignited the base economy because policy makers renewed their interest in Okinawa as a strategically important forward base.⁸⁸ The rehabilitation of Okinawa needed another war – the Korean War. In 1950, Congress appropriated \$50 million of aid, which was higher than the amount of the previous three years combined.⁸⁹ The Truman administration finally spent over a billion dollars to expand military installations in the Ryukyu Islands.

The Cold War positioned the island as a part of the global ideological battle between the United States and the Soviet Union. Under the context of the global Cold War, the United States intended to demonstrate how democratization of Okinawa succeeded in the world. For this political reason, the United States invested a huge amount of capital into Okinawa. The centerpiece of the new policy was to promote political, economic and social rehabilitation.⁹⁰ Under the guidance of Major General Joseph R. Sheetz, the military government engaged in the first organized effort to cope with the Okinawan's problem.

Conclusion

To say that the planning was organized does not imply that the U.S. occupation of Okinawa was, in general, successful. The rose-colored occupation narrative, which was reshaped by the military government, showed an aspect of occupation history. The images of benevolent Americans sprang from the high-mindedness of the American soldiers. The Tenth

⁸⁷ Saki, *Kiroku shogen Okinawa Zyumin gyakusatu*, 177.

⁸⁸ Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945–50*, 153.

⁸⁹ Sarantakes, *Key Stone*, 69.

⁹⁰ Nahashishi hensyu iinnkai, *Sengo wo tadoru*, 80–81.

Army's civil affairs upheld a humanitarian occupation policy and enlightened military personnel. Contrary to the Japanese war propaganda image of U.S. soldiers as brutal murderers and rapists, the U.S. Army provided foods and materials for survival. Many Okinawans remember that Americans were more eager to save Okinawans than the Imperial Japanese soldiers. However, these heartwarming episodes would not become the only lasting memories. The U.S. military occupation and a series of base-related problems such as crimes and fatal accidents have had a lasting impact on the Okinawan psyche. Civil affairs were always subservient to the plans for fighting the war. To facilitate military operations, the islanders were forced into filthy and overpopulated internment camps. Not a few Okinawans suffered from hunger there. To make matters worse, the U.S. military often deferred construction of the camps in order to focus on logistical efforts.

With the end of the War, the military government faced the friction between the military personnel and the civilians. In particular, the sexual exploitation of Okinawans by military personnel was a well-known story among the islanders. The reasons why morality among the military personnel declined were complicated. However, the military government simplified the matter and linked increasing number of black servicemen to serious crimes on Okinawa. Ironically, the arrival of Filipino units exacerbated the friction. Policy debate in D.C. also prevented the military government from conducting occupation policy. The political compromise between the State Department and the JCS agreed that the U.S. should control the military installations in Okinawa but it did not propose a specific revitalization plan. This result occurred because the Navy declined its interest in Okinawa and surrendered all authority to the Army. While they tried to construct military bases in Okinawa, it could not stop the demobilizing process and failed to acquire an adequate budget from the U.S. Congress.

As Okinawa slowly recovered from the war-related devastation under the Army's auspices, the government overstated the outcome of occupation. Yet, it was easy to discern their inflated rhetoric because some American journalists reported the actual circumstances there. Only the emergence of the Cold War in East Asia made it possible for policy makers in Washington to set about the reconstruction of Okinawa.