

Let the Good Times Roll

PROSTITUTION AND
THE U.S. MILITARY
IN ASIA

Sandra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus



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OKINAWA THEN AND NOW

Saundra Sturdevant

Arriving in Okinawa in June 1988 to do the work on this project was a relief. In the Philippines, the low-intensity warfare of the Aquino government permeates everyday existence. In the case of the urban population, there is the threat of potential violence and coups. In the countryside, it is real violence that has generated approximately one million internal refugees during the Aquino years.

Being in Okinawa again was also a great pleasure. Volcanic in origin, Okinawa looks amazingly like 1950s Hawaii before development began. There is the great beauty of high cumulus clouds over the Pacific, clear blue water, sandy beaches, palm trees, blazing sun, and the liquid sunshine of the rain and the flowers: white ginger, bougainvillea, blue morning glories, salmon-colored hibiscus. And there is the gentleness and kindness of the people.

Okinawa entered the consciousness of most Americans at the time of the Battle of Okinawa: a three-month campaign that ended on 23 June 1945. The photos of W. Eugene Smith in which he sought to show the agony and suffering of U.S. Marines as they fought from cave to cave, using satchel charges and flamethrowers to rout resisting Japanese soldiers from their hideouts, are the touchstone. If Smith had not been wounded twice and immediately evacuated, he might also have captured on film some of the devastation that the war wreaked upon the peoples of this country.

Approximately one-fourth of the entire Okinawan population was killed during the Battle of Okinawa. One of the themes that runs through contemporary Okinawan assessment of the period is that Japan used Okinawa, sacrificed Okinawa and Okinawans, for the defense of mainland Japan. The military orders from the mainland to Japanese commanders on Okinawa bear out that judgment: the battle was to be drawn out as long as possible, thus giving Japan more time to prepare for the U.S. invasion of the mainland.

One of the horrific aspects of this holding action was the intense Japanese indoctrination of the Okinawans regarding the savage behavior that they could expect from U.S. occupying troops.¹ The Japanese offered an alternative solution to capture: the murder of one's family and suicide. How many of the approximately 150,000 Okinawan deaths were a result of believing this propaganda is not clear. Okinawans have just recently begun to talk about this period in their history—about the deaths, about being survivors.



An Okinawan woman cleaning up an area by a sea retaining wall. She's listening to a local radio station that plays Okinawan music and gives news and information in the Okinawan language.



At the end of the day, older Okinawan women may play croquet. Here, a group of women players wait their turn.

June 23, 1945, marks the end of the Battle of Okinawa, where approximately 150,000 Okinawans, one-fourth of the country's population, were killed as the U.S. and Japanese military fought for control of Okinawa. People of all ages observe this anniversary of the war's end with antiwar demonstrations as well as gatherings with family and friends, where offerings of food, drink, and prayer are made to those who died.



Large demonstration turning the corner in downtown Naha, the provincial capital. Demonstrators are protesting the announced visit to Okinawa of the Japanese Crown Prince, Akihito. Anti-Japanese feeling stems from hardships endured during the colonial period, the deaths during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, and increasing Japanese economic and cultural domination at the present time.



This bitter residue is one of the main pillars of Okinawan distrust of their Japanese rulers and is strongly manifested in anti-emperor and anti-war sentiments. The other is the brutal colonial period itself that began in the late nineteenth century and ended with U.S. military occupation after the Battle of Okinawa. During the colonial period, the Japanese did their best to stamp out the distinctive Okinawan culture, history, and language. As was the case with Korean opposition to Japanese colonial rule, the resistance of the Okinawans was continuous and manifested in a number of ways. And, as in Korea, Japanese suppression was always immediate and thorough.

Antiwar sentiment is pervasive and has recently found political expression in the election of a new governor, Masahide Ota, who ran on a platform that included the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the island. Ota has since found American officials unreceptive to his proposals for a reasonable timetable for this withdrawal—a stance that reflects, as the Persian Gulf War demonstrated, the great need as perceived by the American military for bases in Okinawa.

The U.S. military occupation lasted until 1972, when the U.S. returned Okinawa to Japanese authority. This period lasted twenty years longer than the seven years of U.S. occupation of mainland Japan. Reversion came as a result of intense antiwar pressure occasioned by the Vietnam War: antiwar groups, labor unions, political parties, and antibase groups formed a powerful coalition to remove U.S. bases from Okinawa. As it turned out, a tactical compromise was made: reversion to Japanese control. Once that was accomplished, so the argument went, it would be easier to pressure the Japanese authorities to remove the bases. That was not the result.

There continues to be a considerable U.S. military presence in Okinawa. Although the 145 bases constructed by the Americans during the occupation had dwindled to 46 by the mid-1980s, these account for 75 percent of the total number of U.S. bases in the whole of Japan. And more than half of the 60,000 U.S. troops stationed in Japan are actually stationed on Okinawa.

Thus, Okinawa—not mainland Japan—continues to be the forward-most commandpost of U.S. military might. The primary mission of the U.S. Air Force and the Marines on Okinawa is to respond immediately in defense of the U.S. presence in Japan, the southern part of Korea, and the Philippines. Rapid Deployment Forces train constantly and are ready to be shipped immediately to the Middle East or to Korea, if needed. Of the approximately 20,000 Marines stationed on Okinawa, 10,000 were sent to Saudi Arabia during the Persian Gulf War.

Kadena Air Force Base is extensive and compares in terms of size to Clark in the Philippines. And now that the U.S. has given up Clark, it may be that Kadena will bear more of the overall defense load. Headquarters of the 313th Air Division, the forward command for the Western Pacific, is at Kadena, as are strategic-reconnaissance aircraft, nuclear-capable aircraft, and tactical fighter wings and squadrons.

Frequent antiwar demonstrations take place on Okinawa, and Kadena is one of

their targets. In 1986, a well-planned demonstration of more than 20,000 Okinawans joined hands, making a ring around the Kadena base. That day the driving rain was so fierce that it was hard to see the next person in the chain. To make sure that the ring was complete, the demonstrators twice stretched out their bodies, reaching to join hands to complete the ring.

Okinawan antiwar fervor, as demonstrated in the drive to remove Kadena, is reflective both of the harsher aspects of the history of the two peoples since 1945 and of the role that Kadena plays in the global strategy of the United States. The issue of nuclear weapons is central: the U.S. has acknowledged that prior to reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1972, nuclear weapons had been stored on Okinawa.²

Since reversion and the U.S.-Japanese agreement stipulating that the U.S. must request permission before bringing nuclear devices into Japan, the two governments have refused to comment on the nuclear issue. It wasn't until May 1981 that Edwin O. Reischauer, the American Ambassador to Japan during the Kennedy administration, publicly affirmed that Navy aircraft carriers with nuclear weapons aboard regularly docked at Japanese (and Okinawan) ports.³

The threat of nuclear annihilation is a part of contemporary Okinawan consciousness. Okinawa is termed the "Nuclear Bull's-eye." The fear is that again Okinawa will be the battleground for someone else's war. Many on Okinawa argue that this again is a situation in which Japan would be sacrificing Okinawa for the sake of the defense of Japan, for in a nuclear war Okinawa would not be just a battleground—it would be destroyed.

This reasoning follows from the fact that it is Japan that made the treaty with the U.S. in which the greatest number of U.S. bases and personnel are not on mainland Japan but on Okinawa. And it is Japan that looks the other way at the continued—and assumed increased and updated—presence of nuclear devices on Okinawa. Finally, it is Japanese Self-Defense Forces who train and plan with the U.S. forces on Okinawan soil.

Many Okinawans find this history, together with the impressive Japanese economic growth and increased military spending, cause for concern. Apprehension has heightened since the early 1980s as increased joint U.S.-Japanese military operations have taken place, ranging from Japanese naval and air force participation in RIMPAC (rim of the Pacific) exercises in 1980 to full-sized joint maneuvers integrating the U.S. and Japanese navies in the late 1980s. There is an unease with these developments and with the extensive contacts between the defense and economic establishments of both countries.

The everyday presence of the Americans is pervasive. On the highways and central streets, U.S. military personnel wearing combat fatigues move in military vehicles from one camp to another or to maneuvers somewhere in the islands. U.S. Marines practice amphibious landings in Fukuchi Reservoir, a principal source of fresh drinking water. And the sound of aircraft is constant, be it the *plop-plop-plop* of helicopter blades, the high-pitched whine of jet fighters, or the deeper roar of

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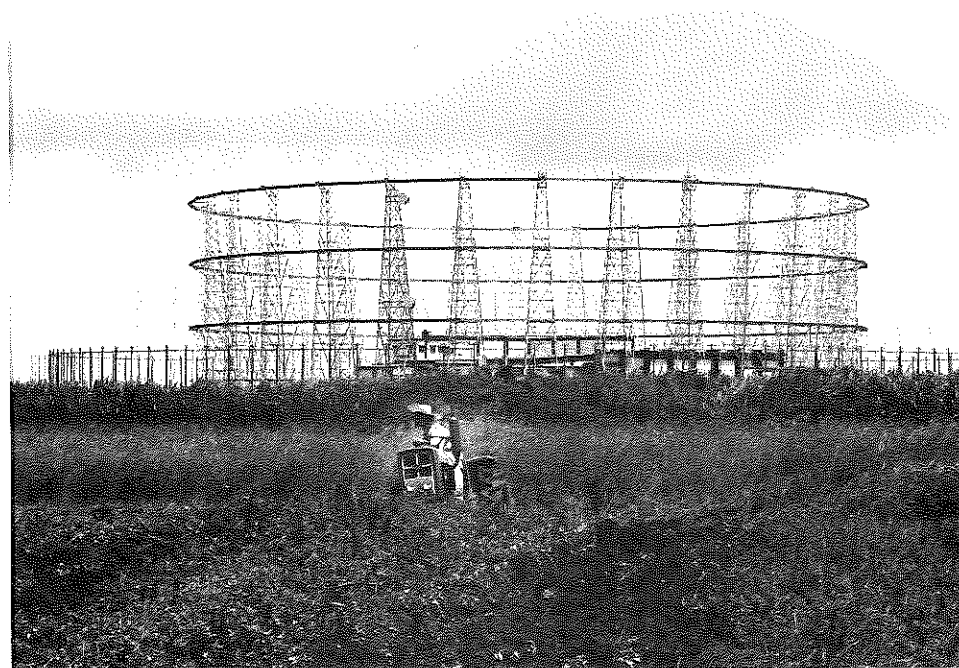
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Kadena Air Force Base is one of the largest in the Pacific. Before the construction of Kadena, this area was prize agricultural land. Okinawans have sent delegations, petitioned, and voted numerous times trying to get the U.S. military to leave the islands. They also demonstrate: in 1986 more than 20,000 joined hands to form a ring around Kadena.



These huge U.S. military communications structures are called "Elephant Cages" by Okinawans. Being a volcanic land, Okinawa has little flat land suitable for cultivation.

View of Yomitan, where U.S. forces landed in 1945, from atop Okinawan clan tombs



During the U.S. Occupation period and into the Vietnam War, signs like this notified U.S. personnel that the sanitary conditions in the establishment were first class. U.S. personnel were allowed to enter, drink, and purchase sexual labor from the women working inside. Establishments without this sign were off-limits. Military Police patrolled and enforced this distinction.



bombers. Apartments housing U.S. personnel have huge U.S. flags painted across their tops. Statues of Uncle Sam and the Statue of Liberty, advertisements for the American Bakery, discos, pizza parlors, used-car lots, and stores selling surplus military equipment abound. In many ways, it is a case not of the U.S. having a military presence on Okinawa, but of Okinawans living within a U.S. military preserve.

There is no denying that the historical, geopolitical, and economic considerations inherent in the U.S. military presence are extensive. At the same time, it is clear that a military presence has a life of its own that has an impact in many ways upon women. Many of the ports and bases that once belonged to the Japanese Imperial Navy, for example, are now the preserve of the U.S. Navy. And the areas around these ports and bases, where women previously provided sexual labor for the Japanese military, have subsequently provided similar labor for American military personnel. The treatment of Korean women in Okinawa graphically exemplifies this commodification of women's sexual labor.

When U.S. forces occupied Okinawa, the Japanese military offered them Korean women, many of whom they had kidnapped and dragooned from their fields and homes to serve as *Chong Shindae* (Women's Volunteer Corps) for Japanese troops. The Japanese military policy was to acknowledge, provide for, and control the sexual expression of its troops. Between 1937 and 1944, some 200,000 Korean women were taken to provide sexual labor for Japanese soldiers in China, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific islands.⁴ It is not clear how many Korean women were used in Okinawa, but during the Battle of Okinawa approximately 10,000 of them were killed. Those that remained were the ones whom the Japanese offered to the Americans.⁵

During the American occupation, Okinawan women provided sexual labor for U.S. military personnel. With more than 150,000 people having been killed during the Battle of Okinawa, the number of families not intact, with family providers dead and injured, was enormous. And this toll does not speak to the psychological traumas that incapacitated many of the survivors who had witnessed the months of intense slaughter.

The task of providing shelter, food, and medical care in an economy controlled by the U.S. military and where the U.S. dollar was the medium of exchange was exceedingly difficult. Women who sold their sexual labor during this period were mainly widows and daughters of families left with few resources to make their way in an agriculture- and fishing-based economy. This work continued during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, when it is estimated that between one in thirty to one in forty Okinawan women sold their sexual labor.

The labor of these women directly or indirectly was a primary source of income that fueled much renewed economic activity. In the early 1970s, the total amount generated by sexual labor was the largest of any industry in Okinawa. According to the Legal Affairs Bureau of the Government of the Ryukyus, the number of full-time prostituted women in 1969 was 7,362.⁶ Although the number was actually much higher, Shimabukuro Hiroshi, an Okinawan writer, takes the figure of 7,000 women

Okinawan woman returning home after work mopping and cleaning a restaurant in the Kin bar area



and calculates that if each earned an average of \$20 per night, the annual income from this labor would be about \$50,400,000. The income from sugar-cane production, the largest industry in Okinawa in 1970, was \$43,500,000.⁷

With reversion to Japan came implementation of Japanese laws and a bureaucracy to administer these laws. Legislation had declared sexual labor illegal in Japan in 1956, and, with reversion, this prohibition was extended to Okinawa. As in Japan, implementation was a considerable problem. By the mid-1980s, it was Filipinas who provided entertainment and sexual labor for the U.S. military. The bar areas where they worked were outside each military base and separate from the area where Okinawan women sold their sexual labor to Okinawan and Japanese men. Despite the location, the *yakuza* or those in alliance with the *yakuza*, were in control.

Due to the nature of the work, it is difficult to determine precisely when Filipinas began to be imported for this labor. It is clear, however, that the process began in the mid-1970s, after reversion, and had to do with the U.S. dollar-yen exchange rate: commodities in Japan became too expensive for the salaries of U.S. service personnel. On the Philippine side, the Marcos years saw the export of labor become a viable means of earning foreign exchange. Filipinas could be found working as domestics and child-care providers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Men from industrialized countries were purchasing Filipinas as mail-order brides. And by the mid-1980s, some 100,000 Filipinas worked on the Japanese mainland as entertainers and providers of sexual labor. Another 4,000 worked in the bar area outside around U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

1. With respect to combatants and noncombatants alike, the Pacific war was a total war in ways that the war in Europe was not. See John Dower, *War without Mercy* (New York: Pantheon, 1987).
2. Declassified materials show that nuclear weapons were stored on Okinawa, Guam, and Iwo Jima beginning in the mid-1950s. *The Nation*, 13 August 1985.
3. *New York Times*, 11 August 1985.
4. Originally, the Japanese military estimated that each woman would take in twenty-nine soldiers daily. But like a number of other miscalculations, the reality was that women often had to take in seventy to ninety. This situation became clearer in early 1992 when Yoshiaki Yoshimi, a history professor in Japan, established the fact that beginning in the mid-1930s, upwards of 200,000 women were lured or dragged to Japanese battlefronts across Asia. They were mostly children and teenagers from Korea. Others came from China and a few from Japan. Yoshiaki Yoshimi's research establishes the fact that the Japanese military was in control of this process and that it was official policy. It was not the work of entrepreneurs, as had been previously asserted. During Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's subsequent trip to Seoul, he was forced to apologize for Japan's role in these events. That is not sufficient. Korean women and their allies have formed an organization, The Korea Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Service by Japan. They demand that the Japanese government reveal the truth of the situation, give a real apology, and provide reparations. The Japanese government conceded the first of these in July 1992.
5. William T. Randall, *Okinawa's Tragedy: Sketches from the Last Battle of WWII*, (Ginowan, Okinawa: Oma Books, 1986).
6. Takazato Suzuyo, "Women in Relation to the Base Situation in Okinawa," unpublished manuscript presented at the International Abolitionist Federation, 2nd International Congress, Vienna, Austria, 3-6 September 1984. Takazato Suzuyo has worked and written on the situation of Okinawan women selling their sexual labor. This manuscript, which she gave to the authors, provides the source for much of the historical information on the topic. Takazato Suzuyo worked for a number of years as Municipal Councilor in Naha, Okinawa. One of her main responsibilities was counseling women who had sold their sexual labor when Okinawa was under the control of the U.S. military, prior to May 1972. In 1989, she was elected to the Naha City Council.
7. Ibid. Takazato Suzuyo cites Shimabukuro Hiroshi, "The Actual Situation of 'Sex Industry,' Okinawa's Biggest Industry," as the source for this data.