

## Chapter I: War Comes to the Islands

### Operation Iceberg

In 1945, ninety-two years after Perry and his men visited Okinawa, Americans returned to the islands, once again to use them as a key stepping-stone to mainland Japan. This time, however, they were not as civil or diplomatic; they came as the vengeful enemy of the Japanese Empire and, in some ways, as self-appointed liberators of the islanders. In any event, they realized Perry's ambition.

When the Pacific War broke out, only a small Japanese garrison force including a communications unit was stationed in Okinawa.<sup>1</sup> As Japanese forces retreated from Southeast Asia, Indonesia and the Pacific islands in 1942-1944, however, they turned to Okinawa and its outlying islands as the logical bulwark to protect the mainland against the Americans who were quickly heading northward. They built airstrips on the islands of Okinawa, Ie, Daito, Miyako and Ishigaki. The garrison force was taken over by the 32nd Army right after its activation on April 1, 1944.

Commanded by Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima, the 32nd Army consisted at the time of the American invasion of more than 110,000 men in, among others, infantry combat units, armored units, air force and naval units, including shipping units. The Army included about 25,000 Okinawan home-guards, as well as male and female high school students and an unknown number of local conscripts and reservists. All Okinawan men aged between seventeen and forty-five had been called up for military or paramilitary service (for example, to work on airstrips, dig trenches, or carry ammunition) while male and female students were recruited to serve as orderlies or nurses. On the main island of Okinawa, one-third of the Japanese forces were locals. The civilian population numbered about 450,000, most of them concentrated in the southern and central parts of the island of Okinawa which would become the main battlegrounds.

War was not new to the Okinawan people in 1945. When the Japanese mandates of the Marianas, the Marshalls and Carolines in the south Pacific fell to American forces in 1944, many of the 80,000 settlers from Okinawa (who accounted for 70 percent of the Japanese population on these islands) lost their lives, some jumping off cliffs. In August, a civilian ship carrying 1,747 evacuees to the mainland was torpedoed by an American submarine and sank, killing 1,508 of them, including 738 school children.

On October 10, the islanders had a foretaste of their fate. To quote *Okinawa: the Last Battle* by U.S. Army historians: "Wave after wave of carrier planes swept over Okinawa after dawn . . . . The first strikes bombed, rocketed, and strafed airfields at Yontan [Yomitan], Kadena, Ie, and Naha. Later waves made intensive attacks on shipping, installations, harbor facilities, and similar targets. The attack continued throughout the day. . . .

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<sup>1</sup>Japan had been prohibited by the Five Power Treaty of 1921-22 from further fortifying the Ryukyus, Formosa and the Bonin and Kurile islands, along with the Pescadores, the Marianas, Carolines and Marshalls. For the United States, the rule applied to Guam, the Philippines, the Aleutians and some small islands west of Hawaii. H. and M. Sprout, *Toward a New Order of Sea Power* (London, 1943).

"Other islands in the Ryukyus were reconnoitered and attacked."<sup>2</sup> In a single day, the Americans made 1,356 strikes, with little return fire. Naha, the biggest city in Okinawa and the seat of the prefectural government, was in flames, with four-fifths of its crowded 533 acres in ruins. The raids killed 548 people, destroyed 11,451 houses and a number of historic buildings.<sup>3</sup>

The raids were followed by more air attacks between January and March 1945. Search planes and patrol bombers frequently flew over the sea routes along the archipelago to destroy or otherwise scare off Japanese vessels of all kinds. American submarines also blockaded the area around the island chain.

Then, on March 26, the U.S. 77th Division landed on the Kerama Islands, fifteen miles west of Naha, to secure a seaplane base and a fleet anchorage from which to invade the main island of Okinawa. It established the first military government in the Ryukyus. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA), issued United States Navy Military Government Proclamation No. 1, which declared:

All powers of government and jurisdiction in the islands of Nansei Shoto<sup>4</sup> and adjacent waters occupied by U.S. forces and the inhabitants thereof, and final administrative responsibility are vested in me as Fleet Admiral, United States Navy, Commanding the forces of occupation and as Military Governor, and will be exercised through subordinate commanders by my direction. . . . All powers of the Government of the Japanese Empire are hereby suspended.

These were only preliminaries to Operation Iceberg, the U.S. campaign to secure airfields and naval bases on Okinawa from which air and naval operations could be staged against the main islands of Japan. The Americans were well prepared. A field army had been activated in June 1944 in the United States, with Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner assuming command three months later. A total of 183,000 troops, mainly infantry and marines, would be thrown into the assault phases, with nearly 400,000 more to join them later. During the October campaign, U.S. planes had taken hundreds of detailed aerial photographs of airfields, batteries, encampments, harbors, roads, and other possible targets of importance. The Office of the Chief of Naval Operations had also published a *Civil Affairs Handbook* for the Ryukyu Islands, with sections covering everything from their geography, resources, history, people, customs, government, law and justice to health and sanitation, education, industry, labor, and financial indices, complete with twenty-two maps and fifty-two photographs.

In comparison, Japanese forces were ill prepared. Imperial General Headquarters had just moved one division from Okinawa to Formosa. The Army General Staff considered filling the gap in the defense of Okinawa with a division from mainland Japan, but discarded the plan. Since "outlying islands were extremely difficult to hold," a former Japanese military officer wrote after the war, "it was felt that it would be far better to streng-

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<sup>2</sup>Roy Appleman, James M. Burns, Russell A. Gugeler, and John Stevens, *Okinawa: the Last Battle* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1948), 44-45.

<sup>3</sup>The Japanese government, through the Spanish and Swiss embassies in Washington, protested in vain against the non-discriminatory attack on the city as a violation of international law. For the damage and casualties, see Okinawa Times, ed., *Tetsu no Bofu: Okinawa Senki* (Naha: Okinawa Times, 1950), 15-21.

<sup>4</sup>Nansei Shoto (South-Western Islands) refers to the several groups of islands extending from Kyushu to Taiwan.



then the defenses on Japan itself.”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, Tokyo ordered the Tenth Area Army commander in Okinawa to “block every attempt by the enemy [forces] . . . to advance their sea and air bases toward Formosa and the Nansei Islands. In order to facilitate operational preparations in the important areas in the vicinity of the homeland and on the homeland itself. Formosa and Okinawa in particular were to be held at all costs.”

The stage was set for what would become one of the fiercest battles in World War II: 110,000 Japanese troops pitted against 180,000 invading forces, with 450,000 Okinawan men, women and children caught between them, mostly crowded into the rope-shaped island and the coral islets dotting its surrounding waters. Americans mobilized all kinds of new weapons, including the armored flame thrower which used a mixture of napalm and ordinary gasoline, sound locator sets, proximity fuses and, perhaps, chemical weapons. The United States alone expended 97,800 tons of ground weapons ammunition, including 58,385,000 rounds of caliber .30 and 1,169 rounds of 105-millimeter howitzer shells, 34,400 tons of naval shore ordnance, and 1,140 tons of bombs dropped by tactical planes.<sup>6</sup> Appalled by American losses at Iwo Jima, General George Marshall, even “favored using poison gas” in Okinawa.<sup>7</sup> The Americans feared *tokko* (special attacks) or suicide attacks by dare-devil Japanese raiders, and possible chemical attacks and snake bites. So fierce was the fighting, in fact, that the number of American neuropsychiatric or “combat fatigue” cases reached 3,000 to 4,000, the largest among the Pacific operations.

The Battle of Okinawa<sup>8</sup> raged for three months from April to June 1945, and resulted in the deaths of approximately 65,000 Japanese soldiers, 28,000 local recruits, homeguards, and male and female teen-aged student “volunteers” and 12,500 Americans. The American casualties included Lieutenant General Buckner, who was killed by a Japanese artillery shell on June 18.

Okinawa was the only place in all of today’s Japan where actual fighting took place during the Pacific War. Losses among the Okinawan non-combatants reached 94,000.<sup>9</sup> The number compares with some 30,000 people killed by the air attacks on London from June to November 1940 and about 100,000 killed by the air raid on Tokyo on March 10, 1945. In all of mainland Japan, casualties from air raids for the three years from 1942 to 1945 are estimated at 510,000, including some 210,000 killed by atomic bombs in Hi-

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<sup>5</sup>*War in Asia and the Pacific Vol. 3: Command, Administration, and Special Operations* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980), 259. It was originally prepared by the History of Imperial General Headquarters Army Section of the G3 Foreign Histories Division at the Headquarters, United States Army Japan, as *Japanese Monograph No. 45* (revised edition) under instruction from General Headquarters, Far East Command. For a Japanese military view of the battle, see *ibid.*, 299-304. For Japanese descriptions of Okinawa operations, see Japanese monographs No. 53, No. 135, No. 51 and No. 83. Also see Hiromichi Yahara, *Okinawa Kessen* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shim-bun-sha, 1972), 69.

<sup>6</sup>Subcommittee on Pacific Bases of the House Committee on Naval Affairs, *Study of Pacific Bases: A Report* (Washington: G.P.O., 1945), 1131.

<sup>7</sup>David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 441.

<sup>8</sup>For accounts of the battle by the Okinawan side, see Masahide Ota, *Okinawa no Kokoro: Okinawa-sen to Watashi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1972), *Soshi Okinawa-sen* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1982), and *The Battle of Okinawa: The Typhoon of Steel and Bombs* (Naha: Kume Publishing, 1984). Okinawa-ken Board of Education, Government of the Ryukyus, ed., *Okinawa ken Shi, Vol. 9: Okinawa Sen Kiroku 1* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankō-kai, 1971) and *Vol. 10: Okinawa Sen Kiroku 2* (1974), and Masayasu Oshiro, *Okinawa-sen: Minshu no Me de Toraeru “Senso”* (Tokyo: Kobunken, 1985), in addition to Okinawa Times, ed, *Tetsu no Bofu*.

<sup>9</sup>The exact total number of casualties is still unknown.

roshima and Nagasaki.

The civilian victims in Okinawa included 11,483 children under fourteen, 10,101 of whom were killed after they were driven from hide-outs by Japanese soldiers, and 866 while performing chores for the military such as cooking, carrying food or ammunition or messages, building trenches, or trying to help stragglers. Others killed themselves, starved to death after Japanese soldiers took away their food, or were shot by the Japanese military.<sup>10</sup> In addition, an estimated 10,000 Korean military laborers and women abducted into prostitution are said to have lost their lives.

An unknown number of Okinawans were executed by Japanese forces based on groundless suspicions of espionage, or killed themselves in despair with hand grenades or potassium cyanide.<sup>11</sup> In one instance, American patrol troops found "a small valley littered with more than 150 dead and dying Japanese, most of them civilians." *Okinawa: the Last Battle* relates: "Fathers had systematically throttled each member of their families and then disemboweled themselves with knives or hand grenades. Under one blanket lay a father, two small children, a grandfather, and a grandmother, all strangled by [with] cloth ropes." It was later learned that all of them came from a nearby village.

Others died of starvation, of diseases such as malaria or from unattended wounds suffered in the fighting, bringing the total number of civilian war-related dead to about 150,000 or one-third of the population. In Yaeyama, from which the Japanese garrison force had evacuated the local residents to mountainous jungles and plundered their livestock, the death toll from malaria reached 3,647, compared with 174 killed by air raids.

Still others were maimed, became deranged, or were otherwise disabled. All were starving, with weary deeply sunken eyes and protruding ribs. Most children were reduced to bags of bones with distended bellies. Fear of bombardment and malnutrition affected the lactation of so many breast-feeding mothers that a large number of babies died of starvation.

At the southern end of Okinawa, some 80,000 civilians—mostly women, children and the very old—crawled out of natural caves during the last two weeks of June alone, many of them wounded. "Most of the women carried babies on their backs and bundles of clothing, food, dishes, and kettles on their heads—all they owned," recounts *Okinawa: the Last Battle*. "They chewed stalks of sugar cane when they could find them. The bodies of many thousands of other civilians lay scattered in the ditches, in the cane fields, and in the rubble of the villages, or were sealed in caves."

On June 22, representatives of the U.S. Tenth Army and troops from two corps stood in formation at Tenth Army headquarters at Kadena for the official celebration of their conquest of the islands. The July 2 issue of *Newsweek* described the scene as follows:

Six hundred American officers and men gathered before the freshly painted white flag pole. A few trucks carrying wounded soldiers parked nearby. While a Marine band played "The Star Spangled Banner," the color guard unfolded a huge American flag and hoisted it against the Okinawan sky. Thus after eighty-two days, on a desolate battlefield 325 miles from Japan, the bitterest and one of the strangest campaigns of the Pacific war ended last week.

<sup>10</sup>Rikujo Jieitai Kanbu Gakkou (the Defense Army Military Academy), *Okinawa Sakusen Kowaroku* (1961), 4-12, quoted in Ota, *Soshi Okinawa-sen*, 208.

<sup>11</sup>Shigeaki Kinjo, "*Shudan Jiketsu*" *wo Kokoro ni Kizande* (Tokyo: Kobunken, 1995), Masaaki Aniya, *Sabakareta Okinawa-sen* (Tokyo: Banseisha, 1989) and Ayako Sono, *Aru Shinwa no Haikēi* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1977).



In the early morning of June 23, Ushijima Mitsuru, commander of the 32nd Army defending the Ryukyus, and his chief of staff, Lieutenant General Isamu Cho, committed suicide. This signaled the end of the Okinawa campaign. It was a complete victory for the United States, although Commanding General Buckner had come under severe criticism for his strategy as he learned several days before his death. After Homer Bigart, a *New York Herald Tribune* correspondent, alleged that Buckner had poorly commanded the marines, David Lawrence, writing in the Washington *Evening Star*, called the campaign a fiasco and “a worse example of military incompetence than Pearl Harbor.” Buckner himself wrote in his diary: “Shick brought in a clipping from the *New York Herald* by David Lawrence apparently instigated by Mr. Bigger [sic] here and saying that the Okinawa campaign was a monumental fiasco of incompetent bungling and demanding that I be investigated for not using the marines for an amphibious envelopment. He also announced friction between army and marines here. . . . The enemy should be pleased by his services for them.”<sup>12</sup>

The United States now had under its control not only the main island of Okinawa but all the islands in the Ryukyu archipelago from the Amami Islands to the north to the Yaeyama Islands to the south.

For all practical purposes, however, the fighting had not yet ended. The Japanese Navy, determined to prevent enemy use of Okinawa, continued its hit and run tactics. A U.S. mop-up operation “yielded an estimated total of 8,975 Japanese soldiers killed, 2,902 military prisoners taken, and 906 labor troops rounded up” before it was completed on June 30, according to *Okinawa: the Last Battle*. The U.S. landed on the island of Kume on June 26; four days later, the Japanese naval garrison unit there killed nine local civilian residents on a false charge of espionage.

### The Friendly Enemy

In contrast to the “beauties” of the island which had impressed Commodore Perry a century before, ugly and miserable scars from bombardment, cross fire and napalm bombs now disfigured the island. Farms and rice paddies had turned into weedy wasteland with dead bodies scattered about and unexploded shells near the craters of those that had exploded. Roads and bridges had been strafed; so had the limestone tombs dotting the hillsides. Nowhere were “the shores...[that] were green and beautiful [seen] from the water, diversified with groves and fields of the freshest verdure,” which had reminded Bayard Taylor on Perry’s expedition of “the richest English scenery” to be seen anywhere. Nor did there remain any of the woods that once “ran along the crests of the hills, . . . their slopes . . . covered with gardens and fields of grain . . . .” The island had been ravaged beyond recognition.

The political and social infrastructure had all but broken down. The economic system had collapsed. Industries—fishing, textiles, limestone quarrying, handicrafts—had been halted. Schools had closed; almost all school buildings had been destroyed, along with desks, blackboards and other equipment. Many of the teachers had been killed and the surviving children were lucky just to be alive. Shuri Castle and many other historic sites,

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<sup>12</sup>Simon Bolivar Buckner diary, April 23, 1945 entry. Box 1, Simon Bolivar Buckner, Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. Also see A. P. Jenkins, ed., “The Battle of Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, 1945,” *University of the Ryukyus Gengo-Bunka Kenkyu Kiyo*, No. 6 (31 October 1997), 69-122.

once symbols of a rich cultural heritage, had been burned to ashes. Cultural activities had virtually ceased.

Worst of all, people had lost their homes, had little to eat, and remained in shock. Never self-sufficient in food production even in peacetime, they now lived on what they could scramble up—any remaining sugar cane and sweet potatoes which were often worm-ridden, rice and soy beans that they had hidden in caves or underground shelters, grass roots, wild berries, rats, frogs, grasshoppers. They drank water that was mostly muddy and filthy. Most of the pigs, cattle, horses, goats and chickens had been killed by bombs or for food.<sup>13</sup> Almost everyone was starving; many were infested with fleas and lice and infected with scabies and impetigo; filariasis, dengue fever and tuberculosis were also prevalent. A large number of breast-fed babies and older children suffered from malnutrition and under-nutrition. On the other hand, surprisingly, only a few cases of communicable diseases such as mumps and measles, pneumonia, dysentery, typhoid, and meningo-encephalitis were reported.

Americans, yesterday's enemy, assumed the tasks of evacuating, feeding, medically treating, clothing and housing the civilian survivors. They were prepared to do this. The U.S. Department of the Navy, which was responsible for military government of the conquered Japanese islands, had in October 1944 published a *Civil Affairs Handbook* for the Ryukyu Islands for "the use of Army and Navy commanders and their staffs and subordinates who may be concerned with military government and the control of civil affairs" in the islands.<sup>14</sup>

Produced by three Yale University anthropologists, Professors George P. Murdock, Clellan S. Ford and John W. M. Whiting, the 334-page report provided detailed information on practically every aspect of Ryukyuan society, history, industry and administration. Its coverage ranged from geography and climate, soils and minerals, and flora and fauna, to history, from Christian missions, racial characteristics, language, personalities, attitudes and values, family and kinship, to sexual and marriage customs, from government and political factions to police affairs, fire prevention, welfare, health and sanitation, the educational system, censorship, postal service, mass media and transportation systems, and from food production and industries such as textiles, housing and mining to land tenure and inheritance. Every town and village was briefly described and important personalities—administrative officials, legislators, judges, police chiefs, community leaders, school principals, educators, postmasters and physicians were named, although that information was out of date by several years.

The *Handbook*, which claimed to have derived "more than 95 percent" of its information from Japanese sources published between 1934 and 1940, portrayed the islanders as "markedly unaggressive, easy-going, and unmindful of the future" in the eyes of mainland Japanese observers, "mild-mannered . . . courteous to outsiders, and unquestionably . . . subservient to authority." In spite of a high degree of assimilation into the Japanese culture, they were regarded by mainlanders as racially inferior, "somewhat uncouth rustics." Toward Americans, they "may in general be expected to feel somewhat less hostile . . . than the inhabitants of Japan proper, if only for the reason that they know themselves

<sup>13</sup>As of 1 June 1945, there were 4,280 goats, 1,031 horses, 825 hogs, 528 chickens and 20 ducks in all of the islands under American occupation. (1st Lt. C. G. Thurston, "Historical Record, Island Command, Okinawa Gunto, Ryukyus 13 December 1944 – 30 June 1945," authorized on 1 December 1945, 26)

<sup>14</sup>See Arnold G. Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands, 1945-1950* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988) for details.



to be looked down on by the Japanese and resent this attitude.” The fact that members of many Okinawan families had emigrated to Hawaii was considered a positive factor: “those remaining at home probably have at least some knowledge of life under American institutions not obtained from Japanese propaganda sources.”<sup>15</sup> Although the authors found no “reliable evidence” to indicate the Okinawan people’s resentment toward Japanese rule, they thought that the relations between them and the mainland Japanese were such that there were “potential seeds of dissension out of which political capital might be made.”<sup>16</sup>

U.S. authorities also ensured that effective control over the islands was established by assigning personnel trained at the U.S. Navy’s schools of military government at Columbia and Princeton Universities and the Army’s schools at the universities of Virginia and Chicago to the military government of Okinawa.<sup>17</sup>

On March 1, 1945, one month before the actual invasion of Okinawa, Admiral Nimitz had also issued a political, economic and financial directive for “military government in the occupied islands of the Nansei Shoto and adjacent waters.”<sup>18</sup> Setting himself up as the military governor of the islands, Nimitz proclaimed that “military government will be the supreme authority and will possess all rights, powers and responsibilities vested in the commander of an occupying force in time of war by international law.”

Nimitz directed the commanding general of the Tenth Field Army (Buckner) to establish military government and exercise these “rights, powers and responsibilities” on his behalf. Setting forth the objective of the government as one of “facilitat[ing] to the greatest extent possible the accomplishment of your military mission,” the directive authorized the field commander to, among other things:

- suspend the operation of any laws, ordinances or regulations which interfere with the furtherance of your objectives;
- remove from any office all high ranking or policy making officials . . . [and] all other officials, government employees, police and other persons . . . ;
- provide for the continuance of essential government functions, using local inhabitants insofar as feasible and making use of the existing local government machinery . . . ;
- activate the local courts and permit them to function under your supervision;
- move civilian populations in whole or in part and place them in restricted areas or refugee camps;
- intern civilians whose activities may in any way endanger the success of your operations;
- assume control of censorship of the press, printing, publications, mails, wireless, radio, telephone and cable, as may be necessary;
- refrain from any public expression of opinion concerning the future status of the Emperor or the institution of the Emperor;
- close educational institutions or permit them to remain open;

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<sup>15</sup>Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, *Civil Affairs Handbook Ryukyu (Loochoo) Islands (OPNAV 13-31)*, (Washington, D.C.: Navy Department, November, 1944), 98.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>17</sup>Fisch, *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-1950*, 15.

<sup>18</sup>CINPAC-CINCPHA to CG Tenth U.S. Field Army, CINCPAC File A17-10/A1(10), 1 March 1945 (Freimuth Papers). In *Military Government in the Ryukyus* (p.21), Arnold G. Fisch writes that “the directive was important not only because of its influence on operations planning, but also because it marked the earliest and probably clearest exposition of a narrowly focused philosophy of military government that would figure prominently in all subsequent Ryukyuan-American relations.”

- protect and preserve all historical, cultural, and religious objects, so far as military expediency permits;
- appoint . . . a claim commission, or commissions, . . . to consider, ascertain, adjust, determine and make payments . . . in full satisfaction and in final settlement of claims on account of damage to or loss or destruction of private property . . . or personal injury or death of inhabitants of the [occupied] area . . . when such damage, loss, destruction or injury is caused [by American forces or their members];
- develop maximum use of existing resources and productive facilities . . . , support the military occupation and military operations; . . . assure food and other essential supplies for the civilian population to the degree necessary to prevent disease and unrest prejudicial to your objectives;
- furnish the civilian population, to the extent necessary to prevent disease and unrest prejudicial to your objectives, with such supplies as are available;
- control all exports and imports.<sup>19</sup>

Or, in the words of First Lieutenant C. G. Thurston, historical officer of the Island Command:

The object of Military Government at Okinawa is to assist military operations, to further national policies of the United States of America, and to fulfill the obligation under international law. This assistance is rendered by maintaining order, promoting security of the occupying forces, preventing interference with military operations, reducing active and passive sabotage, relieving combat troops of local civil administration, [and] mobilizing local resources in the aid of military objectives.<sup>20</sup>

Three groups of military government personnel were attached to each combat division of the U.S. landing forces: an A detachment, a B detachment and a G-10 dispensary. The A detachment would move with the division, estimate the requisites and immediate duties of the B detachment and collect the civilians encountered; the B detachment, together with the dispensary, would maintain the collection points and look after the immediate needs of the people such as water, food and medical care. When these collection points became overcrowded, the B teams would move on with the division and a C team would be organized to control the civilians in groups until such time as they could govern themselves.<sup>21</sup> During the garrison phase, the Island Commander would take command over all military government personnel through a Deputy Commander for Military Government.

Each division went ashore with "70,000 civilian rations" of Okinawan staples such as rice and soy beans, along with medical supplies, with "additional supplies of all kinds . . . to be included in the general maintenance shipments."<sup>22</sup> The advance elements of military government headquarters, including Brigadier General William E. Crist, Deputy Commander for Military Government, and some field teams accompanied the invading forces and began their activities immediately. The field teams would establish holding areas,

<sup>19</sup>Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas to Commanding General, Tenth U.S. Field Army: "Political, Economic and Financial Directive for Military Government in the Occupied Islands of the Nansei Shoto and Adjacent Waters," 1 March 1945. CinCPAC File A17-10/A1-1 (10).

<sup>20</sup>"Historical Record, Island Command, Okinawa Gunto, Ryukyus, 13 December 1944 - 30 June 1945," authorized on 1 December 1945.

<sup>21</sup>Special Publications Branch, Information-Education Section, CPBC, *Nansei Shoto (Ryukyu Islands—Loochoo Islands): A Pocket Guide* (Washington, D.C.: War Department, 1944), 8-9.

<sup>22</sup>*Okinawa: the Last Battle*, 35.



initially sometimes only barbed-wire enclosures with a pit latrine but without canvas protection, collect displaced civilians, and begin dispensing emergency medical care to the wounded, sick or weak.

Military Government detachment B-6, which went ashore on April 4, for example, put up a barbed wire fence around an area 200 yards square, just south of the village of Chatan. "Before the enclosure had been completed," a detachment report said, "civilians from the front lines were being collected by the military police and herded into the camp. On April 5, 100 civilians were admitted to the B-6 encampment. The detachment rose to the occasion and made arrangements for providing food, shelter and medical care."<sup>23</sup> The population of the camp reached 3,300 by April 7. The refugees had to be evacuated to a larger site several miles away. People were issued blankets and housed in overcrowded field tents and later, in makeshift houses built with salvaged materials and thatch for roof and walls.

Among the first evacuees was Tome Uchida, who was "captured" on April 2 in a tomb where she had hidden overnight with her two grandchildren and many other people. The Okinawan tomb, built with limestone, often into a hillside with plenty of space inside, served as a solid shelter for both Japanese soldiers and Okinawan civilians. "When I woke up in the morning, Americans held me at gun point," she says. She remembers having seen U.S. soldiers shouting "*Dete koi, detekoi*" (come out, come out) atop each of the many tombs nearby. They rounded the people up in the middle of a road. "There were a number of tanks parked over there," she says. "We all thought that we were going to be driven over by those tanks. I was trembling with my two grandchildren in my arms." But the soldiers did nothing so brutal. "They simply asked us to walk and we walked to the civilian camp in Shimabukuro."

Another Okinawan remembers when she and others were rescued and assembled:

Certain that we would be killed on that very day, we all cried. There were some GIs who made fun of us and pretended to shoot at us while one cried with us in sympathy. This GI 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.

Another woman remembers that she and other women being led to a camp feared they might all be thrown into the sea.<sup>24</sup> When they reached the camp, however, "we were allowed to go back to our own village to retrieve foodstuff and other daily essentials, with one GI escorting us to protect us from other GIs."

The number of Okinawans in the camps had reached about 130,000 by the end of the first month of the invasion. It increased to 147,000 at the end of May and then to 258,000 by the end of June, or a majority of the surviving population on the island. Most of the civilians taken into U.S. custody by mid-July, 1945, Commander Henry Stanley Bennett observed in 1946, were "children under twelve years and old folks . . . . Adult women outnumbered adult men by well over two to one. There were very few men of reproductive age in the group."<sup>25</sup> Surviving soldiers and home-guards were imprisoned in stock-

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<sup>23</sup>Lt. William E. Mosher, "Report of Military Government Detachment B-6 in Ryukyus Campaign," n.d. (July 1945?).

<sup>24</sup>*Okinawa ken Shi*, Vol. 10: *Okinawa Sen Kiroku* 2, 438-9.

<sup>25</sup>Henry Stanley Bennett, "The Impact of Invasion and Occupation on the Civilians on Okinawa," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, No. 2 (February 1946), 264-5.

ades; several thousand were shipped to Hawaii for imprisonment.

Contrary to their expectation of meeting "a hostile, not friendly, people . . . [who would] not welcome us as liberators, but hate us as invaders of their homeland," Americans, almost invariably, found the Okinawans passive and cooperative. "Relieved at length at being in a place of comparative safety," a military government detachment reported, "they were completely docile in carrying out every order issued and understood, and fully cooperative in all particulars. No single hostile attitude was noted, nor any effort [to] commit suicide or similar vagaries. In fact, a strong determination to preserve life was manifested by the entire population, evidenced by their obstinacy in leaving caves due to fear of death, and their enthusiastic reception of medical care at the dispensary."

The most pressing concern of the displaced islanders and the military government was to obtain food. Fortunately, Okinawan civilians and Japanese military units had hidden some food in their homes, caves and elsewhere, which the military government salvaged by sending out teams of locals. People were also organized into work units to harvest whatever crops were left in the fields—sweet potatoes, soybeans, cabbages, onions, barley, and millet. These were collected and rationed under military supervision.

In the area surrounding the B-6 detachment camp south of Chatan, "large quantities of rice as well as dried fish and vegetables were found," while "the cooking and preparation of the food was left entirely to the natives. There were sufficient quantities of cooked rice for all, but due to inadequate cooking facilities it was not possible to insure a balanced diet."<sup>26</sup>

Food supplies were found locally in such quantities that some detachments did not have to at first draw upon the rations allocated to them. In June, only about 20 percent of the food consumed in the military government camps was American rations. The remaining 80 percent was procured locally. By July, however, the level of local supplies dropped to 40 percent. Reasons for this include the increase in the number of civilians coming under military government care, with consequent rapid depletion of the salvaged foodstuffs. Exacerbating this problem was damage to surviving crops through typhoons and the destruction of man-made walls and irrigation ditches, shifts of population from one camp to another, and vandalism by U.S. soldiers. Repatriation of Okinawans from the mandated islands and Formosa, which began in early 1946, further strained supplies. The food situation deteriorated so badly that Army personnel were told that letters home describing camp conditions would be censored.<sup>27</sup>

Most islanders, obviously, were better fed in the camps than in their old hideouts. But, in addition to the trauma attributed to the ravages of war, deaths from malnutrition did occur. Some food items were unfamiliar to the people; many suffered from diarrhea after eating the cheese and corned-beef in the military's rations. Flour was plentifully available but edible oil was so scarce that some used machine oil to deep-fry *tempura*, which often sent them to the latrine or sometimes even to their death. Some died after eating poisonous cycad seeds to allay their hunger.

Another major concern was medical care. American medical teams, operating temporary hospitals and dispensaries at camps, found themselves busy treating war wounds, skin diseases, respiratory infections, filaria, dengue fever, and tuberculosis. To their pleasant surprise, they discovered no major breakouts of malaria, cholera, scrub typhus or

<sup>26</sup>"Report of Military Government Detachment B-6 in Ryukyus Campaign."

<sup>27</sup>Fisch, 46-48; Marshall T. Newman and Ransom L. Eng, "The Ryukyu People: A Biological Appraisal," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 5:113-57 (June 1947), 141.



other serious communicable diseases.

Most of the population were, however, infested with fleas, lice and intestinal worms. To control insect-borne diseases and improve sanitation, DDT was liberally sprayed on houses and shelters and dusted on people emerging from caves and shelters—heads, bodies and their belongings. From the air, a C-47 plane daily sprayed 8,000 gallons of a maximum strength solution of the powerful insecticide all over the island.

The shortage of clothing was alleviated considerably by utilizing surplus and cast-off GI fatigue uniforms—HBT (Herring-bone Blouse and Trousers) jackets and trousers—which were stenciled in large white letters with “CIV,” “civilian” or “PW” for identification purposes; although often oversized, they soon became staple working clothes for the islanders.

The people in the military government camps were gradually allowed to return to their villages, only to discover that their houses had been destroyed or badly damaged, some of them by what the Tenth Army Chief of Staff described as “much indiscriminate and unsupervised burning” by American combatants. Some villages were cleared by bulldozers to make room for military roads, air strips, munitions dumps, communication, and other facilities, under base development plans to prepare for the final assault on Japan proper.

The military government, temporarily at least, solved the acute housing shortage by providing construction materials—lumber, canvas, and nails—along with saws and hammers. The lumber was cut into two-by-fours, with which teams of local men, under military government supervision, built nearly 100,000 standard (eighteen by fifteen feet) wood frame dwellings roofed with thatch or canvas.

Early on, the military government began to use Okinawans to help run the camps and other relief and reconstruction programs. The military government had decided to “recruit workers, organize them into gangs, and furnish them to military units as required,” and to use food, shelter and money as work incentives. “While it is not U.S. policy to issue ‘no work, no eat’ orders, it will be pretty obvious to the Japanese [Okinawan civilians] that we have it within our power to do so should it become necessary. Every man can help by not giving any of his rations away. To do so definitely reduces the labor supply,” the troops were told. “The shelter and protection furnished to camp populations is also an incentive to work.” To reinforce the money incentive, the military government hoped to establish stores as soon as possible and to restrict trading with Okinawans. “If they can make more money selling trinkets and souvenirs, the labor supply will be reduced.”<sup>28</sup>

At the B-6 camp, the former head of the village of Chatan was selected as the “headman” on April 5. “Excellent cooperation was secured through this native leader and his staff of assistants,” reported the detachment officer. “They assisted in the maintenance of camp discipline, supervised the preparation of food and organized work parties.” Similarly, at the B-5 detachment, “a rudimentary civilian organization was effected (on April 3) with one headman and four sub-headmen,” including one who spoke English. The detachment also used four Okinawan girls as “auxiliary nurses.”

Other camps were also operated with the help of a so-called “mayor,” a police chief, and their assistants. At Camp Koza, the mayor chosen by twelve pre-selected delegates appointed district leaders and a supervisor for each of twelve administrative departments; together, they acted as a civil administration liaising between the military government and the camp residents.

Some men were hired by the military government for such purposes as maintaining refugee camps, carrying supplies to American troops, dumping garbage, digging latrines

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<sup>28</sup>War Department, *Nansei*, 10.

and building latrine covers with lids, helping distribute food supplies among the displaced, and pitching tents. In return, they received a ration and other meals. Similarly, women were asked to sew garments from salvaged clothes, wash military fatigues or work at medical facilities. Work teams were organized to build tents and to harvest sweet potatoes and other crops, or round up domestic animals running wild—cows, horses, pigs, goats and poultry. The daily chore for the approximately 500 men at one camp in northern Okinawa was to collect the bodies left in the field, dig holes and bury them.

American soldiers needed to be watched too. Many Americans of good-will handed out their own rations, candy, chocolate, cigarettes, and chewing gum to people in spite of instructions by military government authorities not to do so. But, occasionally, there were “bad apples.” When some residents—children, women, the elderly—at Camp B-5 were permitted to return home to their village at night, for example, it became so common for soldiers bivouacking nearby to stroll into the village that the military government officer “instructed that troops found in the camp should be arrested and turned over to the M.P. detail for transfer to the Provost Marshal for action.” The detachment report noted: “the chief attraction was women, and it was hoped to avoid disease and any instances of rape as had occurred elsewhere.” Another report, issued on August 6, observed: “Recently an alarming increase has been noted in cases of rape, attempted rape, assault, and similar offenses. Commanders of troops advise that a factor contributing heavily to this situation is the unauthorized and unescorted travel of civs [civilians] beyond the restricted civ areas.”

Many Okinawans claim to have witnessed rapes or narrowly escaped rape attempts themselves although only a very few women reported that they had been raped by Americans.<sup>29</sup> One woman recalls that, after people were allowed to return to their own villages, U.S. soldiers would sometimes come in with a gun in the middle of a night and carry off a woman. “Men created a vigilante group who would strike the village bell (a gas cylinder) or empty cans wildly when they saw a U.S. soldier coming in and women would hide in the ceiling or under the floor.” Still, she says, there were incidents in which soldiers abducted young women under everybody’s eyes. Another woman was out in the field one day digging up sweet potatoes when an American soldier appeared from nowhere and carried her away on his shoulder. When he put her on the ground, he showed her cigarettes and a sack of flour which he said she could have. She regained her composure, pointed to the nearby bush with her body language suggesting that he wait for her there, and she then “ran like mad toward my village.”

### Operation Downfall

Meanwhile, the war against Japan had not ended. In April 1945, shortly after the U.S. landing on the island, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed Admiral Nimitz and General Douglas MacArthur to make plans and preparations for the attack against mainland Japan. Code-named “Operation Downfall,” the campaign was divided into two major operations, Operation Olympic for the invasion of the island of Kyushu, to be executed in the fall of 1945, and Operation Coronet for the invasion of Honshu, scheduled for the

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<sup>29</sup>Official U.S. statistics on rapes are not available, but Fisch writes that “a small minority of the troops began to torment the civilian population almost as soon as the American forces came ashore, with sexual assaults especially prevalent.” (*Military Government*, 82)



spring of 1946.<sup>30</sup> According to Baur, a former assistant to Samuel Eliot Morison:

The Allied operations envisioned would have ultimately involved 5,000,000 men and the largest concentrations of planes and ships yet used in a single operation. The bulk of the force would be American although the British Commonwealth would contribute three divisions of troops (one each from Britain, Canada, and Australia), the British Pacific Fleet, and a small number of air squadrons. The limited British contribution was largely a practical matter resulting from the logistical difficulties in supplying them with unique items. In part it also grew out of past difficulties in combined planning. Similar reasons led to a rejection of the contingents offered by France and the Netherlands.<sup>31</sup>

Okinawa was so strategically located as to contribute to such operations, as envisaged by U.S. planners in October 1944:

The Ryukyus were within medium bomber range of Japan, and it was estimated that 780 bombers, together with the necessary number of fighters, could be based there. An advanced fleet anchorage was available in Okinawa. From these airfields and naval bases American air and naval forces could attack the main islands of Japan and, by intensified sea and air blockade, sever them from the Japanese conquests to the south. The captured bases could also be used to support further operations in the regions bordering on the East China Sea. Finally, the conquest of the Ryukyus would provide adequate supporting positions for the invasion of Kyushu and, subsequently, Honshu, the industrial heart of Japan.<sup>32</sup>

Accordingly, in February, 1945, CinCPOA published a base development plan for Okinawa to be executed by the Island Command Okinawa (Army Garrison Force), which called for the construction of “eight airfields on Okinawa . . . , a seaplane base, an advanced fleet base at Nakagusuku Bay” and the rehabilitation of Naha port. Also planned were “the construction of the tank farms for the bulk storage of fuel and the improvement of waterfront unloading facilities and of roads,” and the construction of other roads, dumps, hospitals, communication facilities, water supply systems, and housing and recreational facilities.”<sup>33</sup> The development work had been incorporated into a larger plan: to develop advance fleet and air bases and staging facilities from which to attack the main islands of Japan and achieve its unconditional surrender.

Military planners had included five additional islands in the Ryukyu chain for invasion and subsequent development as U.S. fighter and B-29 bases and radar stations, but only one of these islands was captured “not for use as an air base but in order to enlarge the air warning net for the Okinawa island group.”<sup>34</sup> The capture of Miyako Island in the south for development as a VLR bomber base was canceled after it was discovered that the main island of Okinawa offered a better and more economic site, obviously closer to mainland Japan as well. U.S. bases were thus to be concentrated on the islands of Okinawa and Ie: altogether, eighteen air strips, to provide facilities for B-29 operations, were

<sup>30</sup>Mark P. Arens, USMCR [MCIA] “V [Marine] Amphibious Corps Planning for Operation Olympic and the Role of Intelligence in Support of Planning.” (“Written in fulfillment of a requirement for the Marine Corps Command and Staff College.” <http://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/arens/chap2.htm>, accessed in November, 1999.

<sup>31</sup>K. Jack Bauer and Allan C. Coox, “Olympic vs. Ketsu-Go,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 49: No.8 (August 1965). <http://metalab.unc.edu/pha/war.term/olympic.html>, accessed in November 1999.

<sup>32</sup>Appleman, *et al.*, *Okinawa: the Last Battle*, 6-7, quoting from JPS 404/14, 7 October 1944.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 419.

to be developed on Okinawa and four on the tiny Ie for VLR fighter escorts.<sup>35</sup>

Soon after the invasion, construction troops and bulldozers were at work day and night, widening and hardening the narrow, winding, Japanese-built roads into thoroughfares, building new roads and maintaining them, and repairing or constructing bridges to handle heavy military traffic. Air Corps units worked on damaged or destroyed airfields, making them operational for evacuation planes and air attacks against Japanese forces.

Although heavy monsoon rains at the end of May stopped practically all construction work until about June 15, a 7,000-foot medium bomber runway, the first American airstrip built on Okinawa, was completed at Yontan on June 17. By the end of June, a 7,500-foot VLR strip (for very long range bombers) at Kadena was 25 percent complete, two 5,000-foot fighter strips at Awase and Kin were ready for operation, an 8,500-foot VLR strip at Zampa Point was 15 percent complete, and construction was under way for VLR and medium-bomber strips at Futenma and Machinato. Harbor development began at the end of April with the construction of a 500-foot pontoon barge pier on the Katsuren Peninsula in Nakagusuku Bay, renamed Buckner Bay, on the southeastern shore of the island. By the end of June an 800-foot pontoon barge pier was under construction at Yonabaru. Preparations for building permanent ship piers and cargo berths were also under way. At Naha, troops had begun clearing the harbor of wrecks and debris at the beginning of June; several months would be required before this work would be completed and Naha could serve as a major port.<sup>36</sup> Undertaking the work were the Naval Construction Battalion troops (Seabees) and members of the Army engineer construction force.

The *New York Times Magazine* reported the scene as follows: "Giant bulldozers, steam shovels, graders, rock crushers and speedy trucks—marvels of a mechanical America—are swiftly converting the natural rustic beauty of the rolling Okinawa countryside into one of the most powerful advanced island bases in the world. A series of military cities must be built. Including both temporary and more or less permanent housing construction, there will be control stations, repair shops, fuel dumps, bomb-storage depots and the other appurtenances of modern warfare."<sup>37</sup>

Base development posed a serious problem for civil affairs. "Increased military requirements demand more sites for vital installations," observed a historical officer. "This fact made it apparent that a great number of civilians would have to be evacuated and crowded into areas containing but little arable land. This in turn meant that the military government would have to supervise the construction of thousands of houses and import nearly all the food necessary for minimum subsistence."<sup>38</sup>

By the beginning of August 1945, the U.S. forces were set to launch their assault on the main islands of Japan from Okinawa. On August 4, General MacArthur extended his Pacific Army command to the Ryukyu Islands for the "final conquest of Japan." Operations Olympic and Coronet, however, were canceled when an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, killing or wounding more than 160,000 people, and another on Nagasaki five days later. They forced the Japanese cabinet under Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki to offer to surrender. The Emperor finally announced Japan's unconditional surrender on August 14 and the Pacific War ended formally the following day. U.S. forces began their occupation of Japan on August 27. MacArthur, the Allied Commander-

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 419-420.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 420-1.

<sup>37</sup>W. H. Lawrence, "Bulldozers Dig in Japan's Front Yard," *New York Times Magazine*, 24 June 1945, 9, 28.

<sup>38</sup>Thurston, 42-45.



in-Chief, arrived in Japan on August 30, after making an overnight stopover in Okinawa. With a corn-cob pipe in his mouth, he officiated at the surrender ceremony on September 2, in Tokyo Bay aboard the USS *Missouri*.

In the Ryukyus, the Japanese marine unit on Aka Island surrendered on August 23, and another unit on Tokashiki Island lay down its arms the following day. Finally, on September 7, Japanese commanders for the southern islands of Miyako and Yaeyama and the northern islands of Amami formally signed an unconditional surrender of these respective areas in a ceremony at what would later become Stearley Heights housing on Kadena Air Base.

United States Army forces on Okinawa had another mission to accomplish before going home. They entered the Korean peninsula from the south in September 1945, a month after the Soviet Union moved its forces from the north, the two of them dividing the peninsula at the thirty-eighth parallel.<sup>39</sup>

Had it been carried out, Operation Olympic would have been the largest amphibious operation in history. Eleven U.S. Army infantry divisions and three U.S. Marine divisions were to be thrown into the initial assault, involving about 440,000 of ground forces and some 20,000 air support personnel. Follow-up forces were to bring the total number to more than 800,000.<sup>40</sup> In comparison, 182,000 men attacked Okinawa in the largest previous amphibious assault in the Pacific theater of operations; the largest amphibious assault in the European theater, Sicily, involved 170,000 troops. Even the celebrated D-Day landing at Normandy in 1944 had an assault force of only 150,000 men.<sup>41</sup> The invasion force, which was to include fourteen fast aircraft carriers, six light aircraft carriers, thirty-six escort carriers, twenty battleships and over 1,300 troop and cargo transport vehicles, thousands of land-based fighters and bombers of the Far East Air Forces and thousands of B-29s, was expected to cause devastating damage and casualties to Japan with irredeemable demoralizing impact. If the fighting continued, the U.S. would then launch Operation Coronet against Japan's heartland with fourteen divisions (nine infantry, two armored and three marine).

Arens estimates that 500,000 American and 2,000,000 Japanese casualties (killed or wounded) would have resulted if the campaigns against mainland Japan had been executed. He writes:

Many historians use the casualty estimate that was briefed to [President] Truman in June 1945 to claim that the projected low casualty rate of 25,000 dead did not justify the use of the atomic bomb. However, those casualty estimates were based on an April 1945 estimate of Japanese force strength of around 229,000. By July 1945, that force had almost tripled to 657,000. With this sizable ground force supported by the special attack forces, it is easy to reach a total casualty figure of close to 500,000 Americans. This is the same number used by Truman in later accounts in his diary to justify the use of the atomic bomb. In addition to U.S. casualties, the Japanese on Kyushu would likely have suffered upwards of 2,000,000 military and civilian casualties. These projected figures for Kyushu far exceed the casualties inflicted by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which

<sup>39</sup>U.S. Army Center of Military History, *American Military History* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army, 1989), 535.

<sup>40</sup>General HQS, U.S. Army Forces in the Pacific (USAFAPAC), "Staff Study: Operation Olympic, 28 May 1945," 32, quoted in Arens, "V [Marine] Amphibious Corps Planning for Operation Olympic and the Role of Intelligence in Support of Planning."

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

ended the War with Japan.<sup>42</sup>

The cancellation of the invasions also left Okinawa glutted with heaps of war materials. "They [drivers of amphibious vehicles] almost sank the island of Okinawa with supplies," a former sergeant attached to the quartermaster corps of military government remembers, "because everything was ordered for the invasion of Japan and that was where all the units were to leave from—from Okinawa to the invasion of Japan. We just had miles and miles of tanks and artillery pieces, jeeps, trucks, rifles, and just every kind of equipment that you can think of."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>Vernon Lostroh, in an oral history interview by Lori Cox, the Research Division of the Nebraska State Historical Society, 19 June 1990, 7.