

# Report from Okinawa

## Long-Term U.S. Military Presence

BY SUZUYO TAKAZATO

*Cet article dénonce 50 ans de présence militaire américaine au Japon, les nombreux actes de violence contre les femmes qui s'en sont suivis et comment elles se sont organisées pour y mettre un frein.*

In the mid-1990s, thanks to the concerted efforts of women organizers and activists, UN conferences began to address military violence against women in war and armed-conflict situations as a human-rights issue. The Vienna Declaration, adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights, June 1993, focused on mass rape and forced impregnation of women as strategies of "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. In particular, it is essential to effectively engage in addressing all forms of human rights violations, including murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced impregnation. (Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, No. 38)

The Beijing *Platform for Action*, adopted by the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995, built on the Vienna Declaration, stated that "Rape in the conduct of armed conflict constitutes a war crime," and urged the necessity to "take all measures required for the protection

of women and children from such acts" and to,

undertake a full investigation of all acts of violence against women committed during war, including rape, in particular systematic rape, forced prostitution and other forms of indecent assault and sexual slavery, prosecute all criminals responsible for war crimes against women and provide full redress to women victims. (*Beijing Platform for Action*, article 233)

Clearly, cases such as the Japanese military system of sexual slav-

ery during World War II, mass rapes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and many circumstances of armed conflict are instances in which the violent nature of military power has been directed against women. Today, as in the past, women and children become entangled in wars whenever and wherever armed conflict breaks out.

Military violence against women also occurs in many other situations, such as military occupation, colonial domination, military political control, and even UN military forces' peacekeeping activities. This reality, and policies to address it, are not included in the Beijing *Platform for Action*. Human rights violations which occur as a result of a foreign military presence must be understood and addressed from a gender perspective. Even when women are not at the battle-site, as in Asian countries during the Vietnam War, wherever U.S. troops were stationed or a "Rest and Relaxation" ("R&R") site established, violence against women occurred. This is the case with the long-term U.S. military presence in Okinawa (Japan).

### Okinawa's unique situation

Okinawa, the southern-most prefecture of Japan, is situated midway between Tokyo and Manila, and has been called the "keystone of the Pacific" by military planners because of its strategic location. Currently, some 59,000 U.S. troops are stationed in Japan, including 12,000 navy personnel of the Seventh Fleet based at Yokosuka. Seventy-five per cent of the U.S. military presence in Japan is in Okinawa, although Okinawa is only 0.6 per cent of the land area. There are 39 U.S. bases and military installations in Okinawa, roughly 30,000 troops, and 22,500 family members.

Okinawa's situation in regard to U.S. bases differs from other parts of Japan in three ways. In 1945, Okinawa was the site of a fierce, three-month land battle between U.S. and Japanese forces, in which Okinawa citizens became entangled. The Battle of Okinawa resulted in the death of one-fourth of the Okinawan population—more than 200,000 people. The battlefield also became the site of violence against women. Second, the most productive land and areas—where Okinawan people had long secured their livelihood—were requisitioned to build vast U.S. bases. Okinawans, displaced by the battle, were not allowed to return to their land until after the military had selected sites for new bases. Okinawa was under total U.S.

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# and Violence Against Women

military control for 27 years after World War II, during which period the U.S. military in Okinawa was directly involved both in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Third, administrative control of Okinawa was returned to Japan in 1972 while the Vietnam War was still in process, resulting in continued escalation of U.S. military crime and violence against Okinawan women. Today, 27 years after Okinawa's reversion to Japan, a huge U.S. military presence continues to be located in highly-congested Okinawa, which still serves as the site of U.S. Marine Corps battlefield simulation drills conducted on a regular basis. Many Okinawans oppose this U.S. presence, and are also bitter that successive Japanese governments have allowed Okinawa to bear the major burden of U.S. troops and bases in the country (Japan Coalition on the U.S. Military Bases).

## **Military endorsement and support of violence against women**

In general, the extent of military violence against women depends on a number of factors: the attitude of the host government and host country regarding the status of women and respect for their human rights; the legal system that is in place to protect their status; the treaties and agreements between the sending country and the receiving country regarding human rights, and the adequacy of the arrangements to prevent crimes. The larger the economic gap existing between the country deploying the military presence and the country receiving the military presence, the more military personnel look down on women in the host community, view women's sexuality as a commodity to be purchased, and contribute to the growth of military prostitution.

The U.S. military system is overwhelmingly male-dominated, despite the fact that ten per cent of military personnel are women (Enloe; Reardon). Troops engage in daily training exercises to hone their skills in killing and wounding to maintain a constant state of readiness that will enable them to be deployed to a conflict situation on a moment's notice. Military bases in Okinawa are located next to, or within, Okinawan residential areas. U.S. troops are allowed to move freely outside the base, and their violent training overflows into the Okinawa community. The U.S. forces stationed in Okinawa were deployed to the Korean War in the 1950s, the Vietnam War in the



*Okinawan citizens are warned to "keep out" of land appropriated at the end of World War II. Photo: Gwyn Kirk*

1960s and '70s, and the Persian Gulf War in 1991. The warriors returned to Okinawa on each occasion carrying their pent-up battlefield aggression, which they released on women in the vicinity of military bases.

To promote "morale," U.S. military operations include routine "Rest and Relaxation" sites in Asian countries (Sturdevant and Stoltzfus). Prostitution and rape are the military system's outlets for aggression, and its way of maintaining control and discipline—the target being local women, as well as women in the military or U.S. military families. Prostitution and rape is viewed as a reward—for example, in "R&CR"—and serves to bolster a sense of masculinity. After the rape of a 12-year-old Okinawan girl by three U.S. military personnel in 1995 (discussed later in this article), Admiral Richard Macke, Commander of the Asia-Pacific Forces and a veteran of the Vietnam War, declared, "What fools! ... for the price they paid to rent the car, they could have had a girl" (Schmitt 6Y). He was removed from his position for this remark, a revealing comment on military attitudes to prostitution.



*Suzuyo Takazato, participating in a day-long vigil outside U.S. Air Force Kadena, a major airbase in Okinawa. Photo: Gwyn Kirk*

Today, former U.S. military women are denouncing military violence and sexual harassment. Both the U.S. Army and Navy admit the existence of sexual violence within those organizations, including violence in U.S. military families (Kelly).

#### **History of military prostitution and sexual violence in Okinawa**

Between 1943 and 1945, Korean women were brought to Okinawa by the Japanese Imperial Army, and were moved throughout the islands, where they were forced to serve as sexual slaves to Japanese troops stationed in Okinawa to defend the Japanese mainland. There were 130 Japanese military brothels established in Okinawa. Some Okinawan women were also made to serve as Japanese "comfort women."

#### **April, 1945-49: the battle of Okinawa and the period of postwar chaos**

Following the U.S. forces' landing on Okinawa, women were frequently abducted from their homes in areas

under U.S. military control, and raped by military personnel. Rapes occurred at random, including the rape of a nine-month-old baby girl (*The Okinawa Times* 1949). Some of these rapes resulted in the impregnation of Okinawan women and the birth of many children, posing a threat to the harmony of post-war Okinawa society. To prevent rape of the civilian population, brothels were established in each local area to service U.S. troops. At the internment camp in Chinen Village, a solitary house was repainted and turned into a U.S. military brothel. According to Okinawan women who laundered U.S. military uniforms they searched the pockets for unused condoms which they returned to the U.S. military before washing them.

#### **June 1950: Okinawa bases become launching sites to the Korean War**

One portion of land returned by the U.S. military in September 1950 was turned into a brothel area in an attempt to address the frequent rapes perpetrated by soldiers in residential areas and the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases. In an attempt to safeguard U.S. military personnel from sexually-transmitted diseases, women serving U.S. troops were required to undergo periodic checkups. The military established the "A-SIGN" system (with an "Approved" sign awarded to establishments passing the health inspection conducted by U.S. military officials), and the "Off-limits" system (which restricted military personnel from unapproved bars). In the meantime, as Okinawa bases became launching sites to the Korean war, frequent military air crashes and traffic accidents resulted in the deaths of Okinawan citizens.

#### **1965-73: the Vietnam war**

B-52's from Kadena Air Base, on the main island of Okinawa, took off for bombing raids over north Vietnam, and Okinawa bases served as personnel deployment, command, training, weapons storage, and "R&CR" sites. The brothel areas flourished. Women serviced 20-30 customers a day and were fined for taking time off during their menstrual periods or to care for children or other family members. Women who worked in clubs and bars under a system of controlled prostitution endured heavy debts and sexually-transmitted diseases, as well as suffered brutality at the hands of soldiers returning from Vietnam. Many women working as prostitutes were killed, and many cases of rape-related strangulation occurred. It was said that going to the (outside) toilet alone was a suicidal act, because a woman would likely be raped. According to a survey conducted in 1969, one out of every 50 women was involved in prostitution. This number dropped to one out of 30 to 40 for women in their 20s and 30s.

## May 1972-1995: the post-reversion period

In 1972, Okinawa reverted to Japan after 27 years of U.S. military administration. In 1973, the U.S. draft system changed from military conscription to voluntary enlistment. At the same time, the Japanese *yen* strengthened against the dollar, and U.S. troops in Japan no longer had superior buying power. During this period, the number of military personnel stationed in Okinawa remained virtually unchanged, although the prostitution areas experienced a sharp decline, as U.S. troops could no longer afford to patronize them. Meanwhile, the number of Okinawan junior-high and high-school girls who were victims of sexual violence increased. Philippine women began working in bars and clubs around military bases in Okinawa, entering Japan on short-term "entertainer" visas. They endured inferior working conditions and severe human rights violations. In fact, in 1983, two Philippine women working in a club near a base burned to death in a fire as a result of unsafe working conditions. (*The Okinawa Times* 1983). Children fathered by U.S. military personnel and problems related to these men acknowledging paternity and paying child-support increased during the post-reversion period. For instance, one woman attorney handled 30 of these cases in a two-year period (*The Ashabi Shinbun*). In 1991, U.S. bases in Okinawa were once again launching sites for war. This time, U.S. troops were deployed to the Persian Gulf War.

## 1995-1999: the rape of a 12-year-old girl

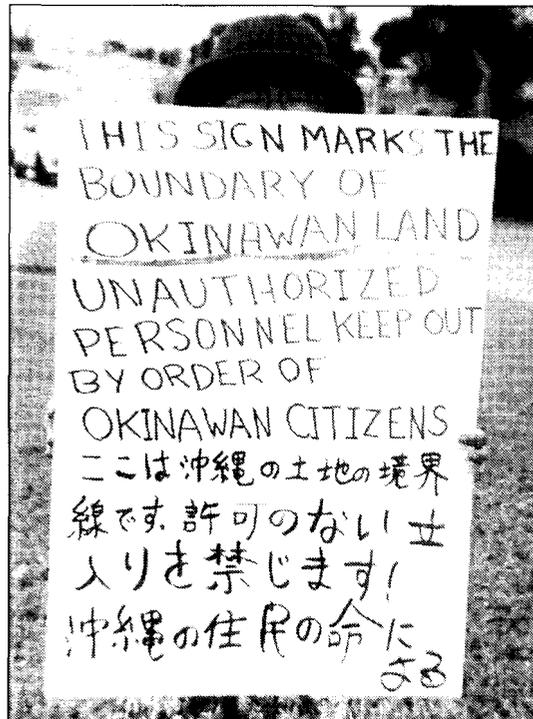
At 8.30 p.m. on September 4, 1995, a 12-year-old girl was returning home from a neighborhood shop in an area near a U.S. base when she was abducted in a car. She was hit and had her eyes and mouth covered. Her body was bound with duct tape. She was raped and then dumped out of the car and left on the side of the road. Her three U.S. military assailants had rented the car inside the military base, purchased duct tape and condoms, and left the base for the purpose of abducting a woman and committing rape. The assailants' statements during their trial made clear their motives for committing the crime. Brothels are drab and reminded them of their poverty-stricken childhoods (personal testimony). Japanese women do not carry weapons such as guns or knives with which to defend themselves, so even if they resist, there is little chance of danger. Japanese people are not able to distinguish U.S. military personnel on the basis of their appearance. Colleagues had committed rape without being caught, so they felt that their victim would not press charges. Thus, they drove around bustling shopping areas and residential neighborhoods for several hours, targeting several women, but failing to accomplish their goal. Finally, they attacked the young girl.

What especially shocked Okinawan citizens was that exactly 40 years before, a six-year-old girl had been

abducted, raped, and murdered by U.S. troops (*The Ryukyu Shinpo*). This recent incident was merely the latest in a long string of similar incidents that have continued throughout the postwar period. But this case resulted in an outpouring of activity for several reasons. First, the young girl pressed charges. Second, the rape occurred during the Beijing Women's Conference where violence against women was declared a violation of human rights and this inspired confidence in Okinawan women activists returning from Beijing who quickly organized to protest the rape, and U.S. military violence in general. Third, the rape occurred during the 50th-anniversary of the end of the war, a time of reflection concerning Okinawa's 50-year-long military presence. Parents, teachers, and citizens were shocked, and were forced to recognize that the age of the girl made it very clear that such violence reaches out to claim its victims without distinction. Okinawans' perceptions of U.S. military personnel have changed over the years. Nowadays, they move about freely, compared to the Vietnam War period, and are perceived not as military personnel but as American citizens.

## Limitations in the status of forces agreement

The stationing of U.S. forces in Okinawa is governed by treaties and agreements between the U.S. and Japanese governments (Status of Forces Agreements). But these agreements treat military crimes lightly, especially crimes against women, and make possible the acceptance of military "R&R" There are several severe limitations to the Status of Forces Agreement from the perspective of Okinawan communities.



Kadena air base was built on Okinawan land.

Photo: Gwyn Kirk

## **No policy for preventing the violation of women's human rights**

The freedom of activity of U.S. military forces stationed in Okinawa is guaranteed, but policies to prevent crimes or support victims of crimes committed by U.S. troops has never even been discussed. There is no systematic data on U.S. military crimes. U.S. authorities proclaimed that the rape of the wife or daughter of a U.S. serviceman would result in the death penalty for the assailant. In contrast, punishments for U.S. military crimes were light. In many cases, because the suspect was returned to the U.S., the trial verdict was never known. Until 1972, U.S. military crimes were handled by military courts-martial, and only after Reversion were trials held under the Japanese legal system. During the 27 years of U.S. military control there was no accurate report of the results of military courts-martial. Even today, there is no complete report of the total number of incidents and how they are dealt with. Some cases are adjudicated through the Japanese courts; while crimes committed inside U.S. bases that result in a court-martial are tried entirely separately.

This situation arose partly due to limitations in Japan's legal system, which judges crimes of rape more lightly than robbery (sentences for robbery result in prison sentences of five to 15 years, while rape results in prison sentences of six months to seven years). Published crime statistics in Okinawa have not itemized rape separately from other felonies like murder, burglary, and arson, another factor which indicates that rape is not taken seriously, and which makes it difficult to organize around this issue. Rape victims are looked down upon by society, and police treatment of rape victims is like enduring a "second rape." Because of women's deeply-rooted mistrust and apprehension toward the Japanese police and the legal system, the number of women reporting a rape represents the tip of the iceberg.

## **Responsibility for children fathered by U.S. troops is not addressed**

The Status of Forces Agreement between the U.S. and Germany makes recommendations concerning the recognition of paternity of a child fathered by U.S. military personnel and the father's responsibility for child support. Whether the father is transferred to a third country or back to the U.S., he can be traced and requested to pay child support. In contrast, there has never been any discussion of this matter in relation to the Status of Forces Agreement between Japan and the U.S.

## **Do U.S. citizens know about the activities of U.S. troops in Okinawa?**

In the case of the rape of a 12-year-old girl, the U.S. Consul and the U.S. Ambassador in Japan, as representa-

tives of the sending country, issued apologies, followed by the Japanese government. But to what extent are American citizens aware that such crimes occur on a regular basis? For the past 50 years, since the end of World War II, the United States has seen itself as the world's policeman. Even after the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has intervened in regional conflicts throughout the world, and continues to maintain the world's largest military operation. What do U.S. citizens know of military endorsement and support for prostitution and rape? Do they know that crimes committed by U.S. military personnel in Okinawa continue to be treated more lightly than crimes committed by members of the civilian community?

## **Working to eliminate U.S. military violence against women**

Okinawan women activists came together to protest the rape of the 12-year-old girl, immediately upon their return from the Beijing Conference, September 1995, a few days after the rape had occurred. Seventy-one women from Okinawa had gone to Beijing to make connections with other Asian women and to share their experiences of living with U.S. bases. Seven of the eleven workshops they presented concerned militarism and peace. Their preparation for the Beijing conference, as well as the inspirational and energizing effect of this momentous gathering, served them well upon their return. They organized a 12-day street vigil in downtown Naha, the capital, drawing worldwide attention to the rape of this girl and, more generally, the many incidents of violence against women by U.S. troops in East Asia. They played a central role in organizing a major demonstration attended by some 85,000 people (out of a total population of one million). They started a new organization, Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, to focus on the impact of U.S. military operations on women and children.

Okinawan women are working on this issue in three main ways: developing their own local organizing; uncovering what has happened in the past through conversations, workshops, drama, and historical research; and making international connections through regional and international networks. We have organized vigils, protests, and public demonstrations in Okinawa (Zielenziger). We have sent many petitions and letters to the governments of Okinawa, Japan, and the United States, and have undertaken speaking engagements in Japan, the United States, and as participants in The Hague Appeal for Peace, May 1999 (Burrell; Kang). We are engaged in research to ascertain the reality and full extent of military violence against women and the way that cases have been handled. Starting in 1945, we have details of 92 incidents so far, taken from historical records, police reports, newspaper articles, and individual testimony.

When Okinawan women went to the U.S. as part of the American Peace Caravan (Jan-Feb, 1996), the following

five demands were issued to U.S. citizens, the U.S. government, and members of Congress:

- We demand the investigation of all past crimes committed by U.S. military personnel in Okinawa, especially those that constitute human rights violations against women and girls;

- We demand the establishment of a concrete plan for the reduction and ultimate removal of all U.S. military personnel from Okinawa, especially the Marines;

- We demand that the U.S. military strengthen its orientation and continuing-education program to sensitize all personnel overseas, and their dependents, to respect and uphold the basic human rights of the citizens of the country in which they are stationed, especially its women and children;

- We demand that the governments of Japan and the United States: (a) implement the *Platform for Action (PFA)* approved at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, (b) revise the Status of Forces Agreement, and (c) re-examine the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty to ensure that these two documents are in accord with the *PFA*;

- We demand that experts on such issues as the violation of women's human rights and the destruction of the environment be dispatched to Okinawa to investigate and evaluate the actual situation existing today.

We appeal to related governments and international agencies to review treaties including the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement and the new Defense Guidelines, as well as other international agreements, in order to bring them in line with the proposals of the Beijing *Platform for Action* and a gender perspective. We appeal for the revision of laws in order to prevent violence against women and to protect women's and children's human rights.

We are working to promote an international network, support system, and campaign to actualize the goals of the statement approved at the International Conference on Militarism and Human Rights held in Okinawa, May 1997 (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey).

*This article originated as a report to the International Conference on Violence against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations, which reported to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. Tokyo, Oct. 30 - Nov. 3, 1997. This article was translated by Carolyn Bowen Francis, and edited by Gwyn Kirk.*

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