John Herbert*

Table of Contents (Part 2):

American Presence in Okinawa
Conclusion

7. Conclusion

American Presence in Okinawa

Prior to the Second World War, American ships had docked in Okinawa on several occasions. Perhaps the most significant of these visits was in 1853, when Commodore Matthew C. Perry docked in Naha Harbour, on his way to mainland Japan with a letter from the U.S. president requesting Japan to open its doors to foreign trade. At that time Perry commented on the Okinawan people, "I can conceive of no greater act of humanity than to protect these miserable people against the oppressions of their tyrannical [Japanese] rulers" (Kishaba, 1988, p.10).

In 1945, ninety-two years after Perry's brief stop in Okinawa, U.S. troops first set foot on Okinawa during the Second World War campaign. On Easter morning they came ashore at Kadena, and there has been a U.S. military presence in Okinawa ever since. Unlike mainland Japan, which was under Allied Power occupation until 1952, occupation rule of Okinawa by the Americans continued until 1972. It is this period of history in which Yoshino, in 'Dete Oide Kijimuna', grew up. Through Yoshino and her family, we see the fluctuating impressions that the Okinawan people have for their American rulers during this period.

In 1972, Okinawa reverted to Japanese rule, but the American presence remained with the long-term leases of land for U.S. military use. The author of this I-novel, Suzuki Teruko, also shares her feelings of the post-reversion presence of U.S. military in her homeland.

^{*} Foreign Language Lecturer, College of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University.

Early Days of Occupation

In 'Dete Oide Kijimuna' we read of the first few hours of the American presence in Okinawa in 1945. Toki had been wounded in that vicinity and was treated for her wounds in the U.S. military hospital by Michael.¹² At first, when she regained consciousness and first set eyes on Michael, one of the enemy, she immediately lost consciousness again through shock. As time passed, the shock receded and as her wounds healed thanks to the medical attention she received, Toki reflected on the way in which these Americans had been portrayed to the Okinawan people before their invasion.

米軍が上陸する前は『鬼畜米英』などと教えこまれ,あれほど恐ろしいもののように思いこんでいた アメリカ兵たちは,意外なほど親切だった。(p.8)

Before the American army landed, we had been taught that they were foreign devils, but the American soldiers whom we had thought to be so terrifying, were unexpectedly kind.

At that same period of time when Aunt Michiko was working as a nurse in the military hospitals, she too had first-hand experience of the kindness the Okinawan people were shown by the Americans. In her reminisces of that time we can read her thoughts about the American military.

アメリカの兵士たちが,敵国民である沖縄の住民に,このようにやさしく接してくれるのも,彼らには信仰があるからだ,とも思った。(p.314)

She also thought that the reason that the American soldiers treated the Okinawan people, their enemies, this well was because they were religious.

In the aftermath of the war, there was obviously a widespread feeling of relief among the civilian population that the Americans were not the devils that they had been portrayed as being. In fact, there was a marked contrast in the way the Okinawan people had been treated by the Japanese during the war, and the way in which they were treated by the invading enemy. In the novel we read of the lack of provision made by the Japanese authorities for the civilian population as many of them were stranded in the battlegrounds.

嘉手納方面で負傷した登紀が運ばれてきた。美智子は,重傷の患者が幼じみの登紀であるとわかって, びっくりした。お互いに,死ぬか生きるかという戦場をくぐり抜け,生きて,ふたたび会えたという のに,登紀は意識もさだかでない。(p.312)

Toki who had been wounded around Kadena was carried into Michael's treatment tent. Michiko was shocked when she saw that the seriously injured patient was her childhood friend Toki. Both of them had evaded the deadly peril of the battlegrounds, and still alive had been able to meet again, although Toki was unconscious.

Not only was it the civilian Okinawan population who had suffered at the hands of mainland Japanese. Through the implied death of Aunt Michiko's brother, it is also hinted that young Okinawan men were used as 'expendable' resources by the Japanese military.¹³

たった一人の兄も,南方戦線へ徴集されたきりであった。(p. 312)

Her only brother had been pressed into service on the southern front and she'd heard no more.

The poor treatment that the Okinawans had received at the hands of the Japanese, made the acts of kindness shown by the invading Americans seem all the more benevolent.

Okinawan/U.S. Military: Difference in Living Standards

Although the Okinawan people were obviously relieved to be treated well, we can see, however, that the difference between the living standards of the occupying U.S. forces and the Okinawan civilian population was great. U.S. military had housing conditions and a plentiful supply of food that was the envy of the civilian population. When Michael returned to Japan in 1951 and spent two days with his daughter (after 'kidnapping' her), he treated her to food in the military mess hall and showed her glimpses of a lifestyle that she could only dream about. When ordered by the military to return his daughter to her Okinawan family, we read of Michael being restrained by a fellow soldier as his daughter is taken away from him. Michael's thoughts on the living conditions of the local populace are made evident at this time.

『放せよ,ロバーツ! これが我慢できるか。ぼくの娘が,あんな貧弱な三輪車の化け物で,連れられて行くんだぜ!靴すら満足にはけないような,スラムのなかで暮らすんだぜ!放せよ! (p.28)

"Let me go, Roberts! I can't stand this. My daughter's being taken away in that over-sized excuse for a tricycle! She's going to live in a slum where they don't even where shoes! Let me go!"

This difference in living standards and the impression of U.S. military personnel living in an 'American oasis' within Japan is a common complaint to this day.¹⁴

Incidents caused by U.S. Military and U.S. Military Personnel

One of the most contentious issues that surrounds the U.S. military presence in Okinawa revolves around the conduct of the military personnel and the effect that this has on the local community. Incidents of many different types have occurred since the end of WW II, some of these incidents took place in the period of American rule of the islands prior to 1972, and some post-1972 after reversion of the islands to Japanese rule.

In 'Dete Oide Kijimuna' we have already seen that Yoshino's antipathy for America changed to hatred after the crash of a U.S. jet fighter into Miyamori Elementary School. On the day of the crash, Yoshino was in her classroom at Ishikawa Junior High School.

She describes the jet as it passes just over her school on its downward path to destruction,

突然,何ごとかと思うほどの,強い力が鼓膜を圧迫した。あたりが急に静まりかえり,眼の前に見え るものすべてが,白ー色に変わった。 キーン 同時に,耳をつん裂くような金属音が頭上をかすめたかと思うと,つぎの瞬間,よしのたちは,もう 机から転げ落ちていた。(p.174)

Suddenly, a powerful surge came from nowhere and hit her eardrums. The surroundings suddenly grew quiet, and everything before her turned white. At the same time, an ear-splitting metallic noise flew just above her head and in the next instant, Yoshino and the other children found that they had fallen from their desk-chairs.

At the crash sight, the scene was one of carnage. Young children were in a state of panic. Fire was raging, explosions rang out, glass flew from the windows, and the children thought a war had broken out.

中庭では,大けがをして動けないでいる子や,洋服の火を消そうとして転げ回っている子どもたちの まわりを,気の動転した子どもたちが,逃げまどっている。どの子も,口ぐちに叫んでいる。 『戦争だ!戦争だ!』(p.177)

In the playground, children who were frightened to death, tried to escape running this way and that, around those motionless children who were badly injured and those who were rolling on the floor trying to put out their flaming clothes. All the children were screaming, "It's a war! It's a war!"

Seventeen people, eleven of them children, died in the crash. Two hundred and seventynine people were injured, the majority of them children. The American pilot had bailed out before the crash.¹⁵ Yoshino had been extremely worried that her sisters might have died in the calamity and rushed immediately to the crash sight. She was unable to find her sisters and her worry grew. Eventually, and much to her relief, she found that they had suffered no serious injuries, although one of her sisters was treated for burns over a three month period. She was not to forget the anguish she had felt at that time.

Unfortunately, this crash which occurred in 1959, depicted so vividly by Suzuki Teruko in this novel, is not the only case of such accidents where Okinawan civilians have been killed by U.S. military air crashes, or cases where objects have fallen from military planes. Other fatal accidents occurred in 1950, 1951, 1961, 1962, 1965, and 1966.¹⁶

There have been numerous cases of injuries and death to Okinawan civilians through accidents involving the U.S. military. As well as the air crashes, there have been traffic accidents, and even accidental shootings. However, perhaps the most emotive incidents are not the accidents, but the criminal acts perpetrated by U.S. military personnel. Killings, mainly falling into the categories of strangulation of women and stabbing of men (in particular taxi drivers), occurred in 1955, 1959, 1961, 1963, 1966, 1967, 1972, 1973,

1974, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1991, 1993 and 1995. Added to these are a large number of assaults, which resulted in injury rather than death. (Okinawa Times, 1995)

Perhaps the crime which has received the most attention was the 1995 rape of a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl by three U.S. servicemen. A protest rally drew some 85,000 Okinawan residents. Sadly, this was not the only case of child rape carried out by U.S. servicemen. In 1975, two junior high school girls were raped by a twenty-one-year-old U.S. serviceman. Other rapes occurred in 1985 and 1993. (Okinawa Times, 1995)

In the novel, we read only of the Miyamori accident to remind us of some of the terrible ways in which Okinawans have been affected by the U.S. military presence. In reality, the Okinawan people have had to deal with many such accidents, and sadly, many mindless criminal acts to boot.

U.S. Military Land Use in Okinawa

For Yoshino, the route to junior high school was something that caused her many misgivings. The quickest route for her was to go along prefectural route thirteen, but in doing so she had to pass right by Ishikawa Beach. As Yoshino explains,

石川ビーチは,米軍に接収された米軍属専用のリゾートビーチで,現地の沖縄住民は,入れない。北 と南にある二つの出入口には,いつも,腰にピストル,肩にライフルをかついだ兵士が立っていて, ビーチに入る人,ビーチから出ていく人をチェックしていた。(p.144)

Ishikawa Beach had been requisitioned by the American military, and, being a resort beach for U.S. military use, Okinawan civilians could not enter. There were always soldiers at the two entrances to the north and south, standing with pistols at their sides and rifles slung on their shoulders, who checked those people entering and leaving the beach.

This resort beach, behind its high wire fence, had wonderful facilities and was kept meticulously clean. The neighbouring Okinawan housing was, in stark contrast, slum-like to Yoshino's eyes. The young American girls of her age, with their manicured finger nails and their fancy bathing clothes, seemed to be living in a sophisticated world, much removed from her own. In the end Yoshino avoided that route to school, preferring a longer route that meant first and foremost she didn't have to watch the Americans having fun on 'their' beach, and also that the precocious American girls couldn't see her in her unsophisticated school uniform. Yoshino's feelings of antipathy towards the American girls of her own age and their customs, are expressed thus,

金網のこちら側にいる自分は, あんな恥ずかしい格好は頼まれてもイヤだと思っているのに, あのなかに入れば, なんの違和感もないように思えた。(p.145)

Yoshino, on her side of the wire fence, thought that she really wouldn't want to get all dressed up like that even if asked to do so. However, she realised she wouldn't look out of place if she was in there.

The issue of Okinawan land having been appropriated for U.S. military use is extremely controversial to this day. Just as Yoshino in 'Dete Oide Kijimuna' felt repulsion at the high wire fences that interfered with her everyday existence, many Okinawans do so today. Most newspaper articles that cover the military base controversy tell their readers the startling statistics that 75% of U.S. bases in Japan are located in Okinawa prefecture, despite the fact Okinawa is only equal to roughly 0.6% of the total land area of Japan. In fact, U. S. bases comprise 10.7% of Okinawa's total land, and 20.3% of mainland Okinawa (Ampo, 1999, p. 18).¹⁷

Both the Japanese government and the American military are seen as the villains of the piece by the group of Anti-war landowners, whose land is used by the U.S. military in spite of their opposition. In fact, in some cases where the lease on the land had expired, the Japanese government became illegal occupants of that land.¹⁸

There has been much opposition from Okinawan civilians to use of Okinawan land for the military bases and for military training. There have been many demonstrations and, on occasions, victories have been won against a formidably powerful foe. As Suzuki Teruko writes in her epilogue to 'Dete Oide Kijimuna',

帰省するたびに変容していく郷里を見ると、さびしい気がする。そんななかで、一つだけうれしいこ とがある。それは、あの石川ビーチが米軍から石川市に返還されて、今では、市民の憩の広場になっ ていることだ。わたしにとって、いや、おそらく石川市民にだれにとっても、いまわしい思い出でし かないあの金網がすっかり取り除かれて、どこからでも、だれでも出入りの自由な浜海浜公園として、 市民に開放されているのを見ると、復帰してよかったと思う。(p.325)

Whenever I return home and look at the changing face of my hometown, I feel a sadness. Amongst this sadness, there is one thing that pleases me. That is the fact that Ishikawa Beach has been returned to Ishikawa City from the American military, and now, has become a place for the citizens to relax and enjoy themselves. For me, no, for perhaps all Ishikawa citizens, that high wire fence which brings back only abominable memories, has been removed, and when you look at it as a public beach where anyone can enter freely from any direction, you feel good that it has been returned.

The most recent controversy surrounding land use has, paradoxically, revolved around the U.S. military promising to return 21% of the land it is using in Okinawa. Just as Ishikawa Beach (the beach that Yoshino found so offensive) has been returned to the Okinawan people, there are plans to return further land, including the base at Futenma, if a heliport can be relocated (Japan Times, 2000). However, the wishes of the local people at the sight of the proposed new heliport at Nago in Northern Okinawa, seem to have been largely ignored, and it is the twin forces of economics (in the form of government subsidies to an ailing Okinawan economy) and politics (seen as being in the interests of mainland Japan and the U.S. by many Okinawan citizens) that appear to be winning this battle.¹⁹

The new heliport, if sited at Nago City, will bring with it one hundred billion yen's worth of government funding to boost ailing industry in Okinawa. In addition, much needed revenue will result from the Japanese government's decision to use Nago City as a

venue for the G8 summit in 2000.²⁰ Economics, intrinsically linked with politics, as well as politics itself, has played a large role in the changes to Okinawa since the war. This 'fact of life' is not lost on Suzuki Teruko. In her final comments at the end of her book she laments about modern day Japan, and her home city of Ishikawa on Okinawa.²¹

いまや,世界-といわれる経済大国の平和な日本に住んでいながら,自分がいかに精神・文化面で貧しい環境に生きていることかと思うことが,しばしばある。戦後の復興を急ぐあまり,合理的なもの, 経済性のよいものばかりを追求して,非合理で,あまりお金もうけにつながりそうにないものを簡単 に切り捨ててしまったからではないだろうか。(p.325)

Now, as I am living in a peaceful Japan, known as the number one economic superpower, there are often times when I think what a spiritually and culturally barren environment I am living in. This is surely because after the war, to quicken the revival, rational things and only things good for economism were pursued, and things that weren't rational, that didn't look as if they were connected with making much profit were simply discarded.

Those sentiments can be extended to the years well beyond the immediate post-war years, and at the turn of the century, with the Nago City heliport controversy still raging, Suzuki Teruko's words seem most apt.

Final thoughts on the American military presence in Okinawa

There is no doubt that Okinawa has had a turbulent history. The war years were a time of hardship for the whole of the Japanese archipelago. Okinawa, too, suffered terribly at that time with the death of many soldiers and civilians (a large number through suicide). Since 1945, there has been a continuous U.S. military presence on Okinawa. Although at first the Okinawans were relieved to find the American invaders kind beyond their wildest expectations, Okinawa has undoubtedly suffered in several ways from the American presence. We must not forget the argument that security is brought to the region through the U.S. presence, and that there are economic rewards to be reaped by the islands through the investment brought in connection with the U.S. military. However, it also cannot be denied that the Okinawan civilians have suffered through loss of land, accidents and criminal acts, at the hands of the U.S. military. In 'Dete Oide Kijimuna', Suzuki Teruko brings this fact home to the readers through descriptions of an appalling scene of death and destruction at an elementary school due to the U.S. jet fighter crash, and through images of the pervasive presence of the military and their families at play in an 'American Oasis', on Okinawan land, where Okinawans are not permitted to set foot.

Clearly, the American presence on Okinawa is an emotive issue for the Okinawan people. This fact is not lost upon Japanese Defence Chief Kawara Tsutomu who understands "the long suffering" of the people. Unfortunately, the statistics which show 75% of U.S. bases are located in the 0.6% of Japanese land that constitutes Okinawa, suggests that merely "understanding" is not good enough.

Conclusion

For the student of Japan and Japanese, a well chosen 'watakushi shousetsu', can 'kill two birds with one stone' in that this type of novel can act not only as a linguistic source for further study of the language, but also as a starting point for further, more detailed, study of some aspect of Japan. The chances are that the chosen 'watakushi shousetsu' will not fall into the category of literary masterpiece, but will illuminate the life and times of the characters portrayed in that novel. 'Dete Oide Kijimuna' is a fine example of just such a novel. Linguistically, apart from the many utterances of Okinawan dialect, the language is not too difficult for the non-native reader. As for the themes encompassed in the novel, they are very pertinent in the modern age.

Just as Yoshino, the main character of 'Dete Oide Kijimuna', has had a three-way relationship between Okinawa, the Japanese mainland, and the United States since 1946, Okinawa itself has had a triangular relationship involving the same territories for the last fifty-five years. It has been a period in which all three parties to the relationship have rarely been in agreement, and have, more often than not, been pulling in different directions (although in the case of the United States and Japan, not always in completely the opposite direction). This pulling has produced a rather distorted and disturbed triangle, with the interests of Okinawa most certainly not at the apex. Yoshino, too, was pulled around by the three forces of identity within her. In her case, however, it was the Okinawan corner of the triangle that proved strongest, and the American corner that was marginalised to the greatest degree.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

12 On Easter morning, April 1, 1945 at 8.30 a.m., 20,000 American soldiers came ashore at Kadena. For an account of the Okinawa campaign see Gow, 1986.

Toki, a non-combatant, was caught up in the fighting as were many other civilians. As Kerr notes, "No provision had been made by the Japanese high command to protect or segregate the non-combatants; every Okinawan, old and young, was on his own; he might preserve his life if he could find sufficient shelter" (Kerr, 1964, p.469).

Donald Keene describes the task of trying to deal with the civilians who had been caught up in the battle-zone on that first day of the American landings. "I went around with [a boy of nine or ten] from cave to cave, wherever the Okinawan civilians might be hiding, persuading them to come out. It is bad enough in warfare when the combatants are all military personnel, but when old people, women, and children, some of them with no idea of what is happening to them, are caught up in the fighting, the madness of war becomes excruciatingly evident" (Keene, 1996, p.44).

13 It appears that minority groups in Japan were treated poorly in the Japanese military. Kerr notes that, ".....able-bodied Okinawan males had been conscripted for 'expendable' duties at the front" (Kerr, 1964, p. 471).

Keene, in his memoirs, also gives us insight into the way in which Okinawan soldiers felt they had been treated by the military. "Other prisoners were Okinawans who had been drafted into the boeitai, a defense unit. Most of them had had no military training, and some were bitter about the treatment they had received from the Japanese from Naichi (the four main islands of Japan)" (Keene, 1996, p.54).

It was not only the Okinawans, but there is one enlightening extract about an Ainu (another of Japan's minority groups) soldier. "..... on Okinawa many soldiers raised the white flag of surrender. I remember, for example, one Japanese soldier who explained that he was half Ainu and for this reason had been badly treated by the Japanese military" (Keene, 1996, p.53-54).

- 14 Those that believe the U.S. military are a bane on the lives of Okinawan people through their behaviour, as well as their mere presence, would probably agree with the following. "In the eyes of host communities, U.S. troops stationed overseas often seem arrogant and insensitive. They usually know little about the country's history and culture. They speak only English, pay their way with dollars, and live in spacious, fenced-off enclaves at higher standards than most local citizens" (Kirk et al, 1999).
- 15 The crash was caused due to poor maintenance, details of which were released to the public only recently. For further details, in English, see the Okinawa Times Weekly Times 1999.7.3, Sat. evening edition available at www.okinawatimes.co.jp/eng/19990703.html

16 The following are more details of those incidents, translated from the Oct.12, 1995 edition of the Okinawa Times. These details, along with an incredibly long list of incidents caused by the U.S. military personnel, can be found on the internet at http://www.walrus.com/~dawei/ references/crimelist-e.html

I reproduce the entries here as they appear on the internet with some small errors in translation remaining.

Aug.2,1950

A refuel tank was dropped on the yard of a private house from the U.S. Army aircraft flying over Yomitan Village and exploded, killing one and injuring three. Oct.20,1951

A fuel tank was dropped on a private house from a U.S. airforce fighter in Makishi, Naha. It burned the house totally, killing six residents.

Dec.7,1961

..... U.S. Army jet fighter crashed on a private house in Kawasaki, Gushikawa Village; six citizens killed or injured. U.S. Army paid \$623 compensation to the bereaved family. Dec.20,1962

A U.S. transport aircraft crashed on a private house in Yara of Kadena Town; seven citizens were killed and eight were seriously or slightly injured.

Jun.11,1965

A small size trailer dropped from a U.S. bomber on Oyashi of Yomitan Village during bombing exercise, killing an eleven-year-old schoolgirl. The U.S. Army announced that it was dropped mistakenly. The compensation paid was slightly more than \$4,700. May 20,1966

A jet fighter failed in taking off Kadena base, hit and killed a 33-year-old man walking on the road outside the base. The family was compensated \$14,000, one fifth of the amount claimed.

- 17 For an excellent representation of how widespread the U.S. military bases actually are on Okinawa, see the Map of U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa, Ampo, 1999, p.18
- 18 The extent to which the government has become embroiled in this controversy can be seen in an article by Wilkinson. In response to revisions that the government made to a law concerning U.S. military land use, Wilkinson states that if it becomes difficult to comply with a law, the government simply change it. In doing so, "..... the government violated the spirit and letter of Article 29 of its own constitution, which reads, "The right to own or to hold property is inviolable. Property rights shall be defined by law, in conformity with the public welfare" (Wilkinson, 1997, p.15).

The government became an illegal occupant of land owned by Chibana Shoichi, an anti-base activist. As Chibana says, "After the lease expired, in fact, my requests to enter my own land were consistently ignored, and I took the government to court They continued to let the U.S. military use the land, despite the fact that there was absolutely no legal basis for the occupation" (Chibana, 1997, p.11).

A poll conducted by the Asahi Shimbun and Okinawa Times showed that more than 80% of Okinawans opposed the revisions to the law on U.S. military land use. The mayors of Naha and Okinawa were also opposed, but the Diet passed the revision (Wilkinson, 1997).

19 The Nago heliport saga has had many twists and turns, and perhaps there are more still to come. The outcome has been, and will be, affected by many factors. First, Nago City mayor Higa Tetsuya stated that he would accept the offshore heliport in spite of a referendum being won by the opponents of the heliport. He then resigned to be replaced by Kishimoto Takeo, a pro-heliport supporter. The referendum results on approval or otherwise of the heliport proposal were as follows, " (1) I approve (8.13%); (2) I approve because I expect there to be economic benefits for the Nago region and that appropriate measures will be taken to protect

the environment (37.18%); (3) I oppose (51.63%); (4) I oppose because I expect neither economic benefits for the region nor appropriate measures to be taken to protect the environment (1.22%)" (Ampo, 1999, p.30). Second, anti-base Okinawan Governor Ohta, who said he would reject proposals for the offshore heliport, was defeated in the Nov. 1998 election by Tokyo-backed Inamine Keiichi (see Urashima, 1999, pp. 19-20, for an anti-base perspective on this election battle). Third, in exchange for their decision to accept the new airport, the Okinawan Prefectural and Nago Municipal governments proposed a fifteen year time-limit for its use by the U.S. military (Japan Times, 2000).

Japanese government Defence Chief, Kawara Tsutomu, summed up the position of the two sides when he said, "Given Okinawa's history, the long suffering of its people and their sentiment resulting from such a plight, I can understand their request for setting a fifteen year time limit". However, he then added, "But the future international security situation, which is extremely difficult to predict, should also factor into the equation", echoing the U.S. perspective (Japan Times, 2000).

- 20 For two alternative plans for stimulating the local economy, albeit on a much smaller scale than the hundred billion yen over ten years that the Japanese government will put forward, see Chibana, 1996, p.13 and Mashiki, 1999, pp. 24-28.
- 21 In May 1972 Okinawa was returned to Japanese rule and in October the same year Mitsubishi Oil, in collaboration with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, started the construction of landfill in Kin Bay to create a terminal for oil tankers. In addition, Henza Island, the island that had inspired Yoshino to remember the images in the opening passage of The Pillow Book is now "covered with the huge light-green forms of oil storage tanks" (Tsuno, 1982, pp. 30-33).