

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 An overview of Okinawa and the U.S. bases

In the Western Pacific Ocean from the southernmost of mainland of Japan to Taiwan is lying the Ryukyu archipelago composed of a chain of small islands (Figure 1.1). Okinawa Prefecture occupying the southern half of the Ryukyus is Japan's southernmost prefecture which is divided into three groups of islands known as Okinawa, Miyako, and Yaeyama.

Okinawa Prefecture is one of the smallest in Japan, 44th in area and 35th in population among 47 prefectures. The total land area of Okinawa consisting of 160 islands, among which about 50 are inhabited islands, is only



Figure 1.1 The Ryukyus in East Asia

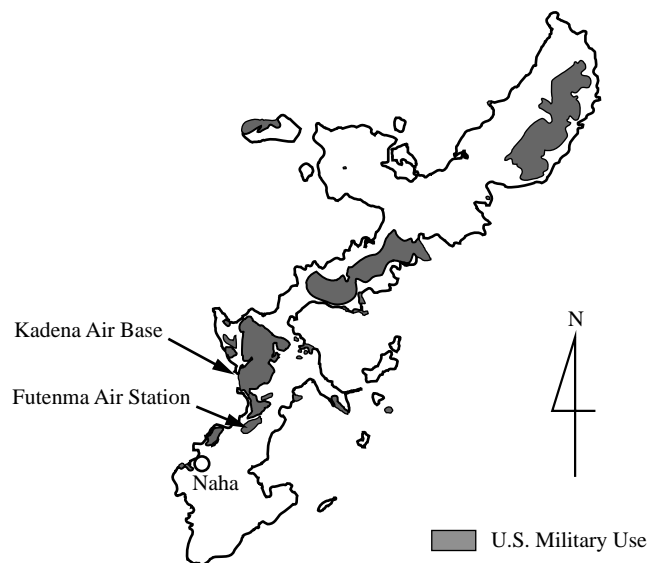


Figure 1.2 Okinawa Island in the Ryukyus and U.S. Bases.

about 0.6% of the land area of Japan and Okinawa is made up of 1.25 million individuals, 1.1% of the Japanese population. The population density is 9th after metropolitan areas such as Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and some others. The biggest island in the prefecture is Okinawa Island, the land area of which is about a half of the prefecture land area and one third of which 1.14 million individuals reside in. Moreover, for the historical, geographical and military strategic reasons, there exist 39 facilities of the U.S. Forces as of March 1998 which account for about 75% in area of the U.S. Bases and Facilities in Japan, and, particularly in Okinawa Island, 20 % of the small island area is used by the U.S. Forces (Figure 1.2). This results in high population density in the residential district in Okinawa and that is the case for even the area in the nearest vicinity of bases.

During World War II, Okinawa was the land of Japan where the only and most tragic land war in Japanese history unfolded, and then non-combatant individuals were involved and about 160,000 Okinawans were killed in the war.

The U.S. Forces, after landing in Okinawa, occupied military bases the former Japanese Imperial Army had built. After the war, the U.S. Forces' administrative authorities governed over Okinawa and took in surrounding land of the bases with the background of military power and further expanded and strengthened the bases.

In the situation where there was no place or home for the residents to live in and the U.S. Forces interned them in concentration camps, the U.S.



Figure 1.3 Aerial photograph of Kadena Air Base.

Forces took over one tract of land after another. When the residents were removed from the camps they found their land was in the bases. For example, the residents of Sunabe were released from the camp after one year or so, but part of their land was released after 10 years and the rest of their land is still within the fence of Kadena Base.

The sites of the both bases are on the fertile and flat land positioned in the heartland of Okinawa, and therefore, the place of residential and farm land owned and used by the residents until World War II. Kadena Air Base and Futenma Air Station were certainly built in the middle of highly cultivated part of the island. Thus Okinawa was transformed into an “island of bases.”

Moreover, the post-war economy and urbanisation of Okinawa after the complete destruction due to the war took off from the gates of bases and concentration camps as early as in the period when currency was not reissued yet. This leads to the fact that the bases are located in the very middle of the most crowded residential and commercial parts of the island.

The reversion of the administrative authority of Okinawa from the U.S. to Japan in 1972 did not change the situation basically.

1.2 An overview of Kadena Air Base

Kadena Air Base (Figure 1.3) is spreading over the three municipalities of Chatan Town, Kadena Town and Okinawa City. The Base has two runways with accompanying taxiways, tarmacs, engine tuning shops, hangars,



Figure 1.4 Aerial photograph of Futenma Air Station.

and equipment as well as the headquarters, barracks, telecommunication facilities, homes, schools, clinics and other such facilities.

It was set up as “Central Airfield” in September 1944 by the former Japanese Imperial Army. In April 1945 the U.S. Forces that landed on the Okinawa Island occupied this airfield. Thereafter the base was reconstructed, expanded and became more functional through the requisition of immense amounts of surrounding private land etc. During the Korean War (1950–1953) the base was used as a bomber unit base. During the Vietnam War in 1967 two runways were completed and the base played an important role for the bombers to make sorties and as a supply relay depot. From 1968 to 1970, B52 Stratofortress strategic bombers were stationed at the Base. In 1991, with the close of the Clark Base in the Philippines, the 353rd Special Operations Group and Air Transport C-12 aircraft were moved to Kadena Base. Presently, many aircraft such as F-15 Eagle fighters, KC-135 Tanker Transport, E3A Airborne Early Warning Aircraft, P-3C Orion Anti Submarine Warfare Aircraft, HC-130 Hercules rescue transports, and HH-3 rescue helicopters are in fact permanently stationed at Kadena Base.

1.3 An overview of Futenma Air Station

Futenma Air Station (Figure 1.4) was constructed immediately after the occupation of Okinawa by the U.S. Forces and is positioned in the centre of Ginowan City. In 1953 the runway was extended to 2,700m and now the base has a 2,800m \times 46m runway. In 1960 the management of the base was transferred from the U.S. Air Force to the U.S. Marine Corps, and today Futenma is home to the Marine Aircraft Wing, 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force, which is prominent for helicopters. The base has many support facilities such as hangars, maintenance and repair facilities, storage facilities, a communication facility, parts warehouses, offices, PX, clubs, bars, health clinics, a fire station etc.