1 History of U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa

1945: The U.S. military landing on the main island of Okinawa

Okinawa, which has bountiful nature and a unique culture, was reduced to ashes during the Pacific War as a relentless land battle, unparalleled in history, took place with shelling from naval ships and bombardment from the air so fierce that it has been called the “Typhoon of Steel.”

Estimates put the amount of unexploded bombs that remain from the fighting at approximately 10,000 tons (roughly 22 million pounds). Even in 2017, approximately 1,985 tons (approximately 4.4 million pounds) are believed to still remain in the ground.

1945: Construction of Futenma Airfield

The U.S. military, which landed on Okinawa, forcibly isolated residents in concentration camps and seized their land to construct a series of new bases. Okinawan people had their land expropriated without any say at all. Those whose land was taken could not return home even if they wanted to and were left with no choice but to settle in the area around the base.

1955: New Base Construction

Even after the Pacific War ended, the U.S. military deemed it necessary to construct new bases due to the outbreak of the Korean War and other changes in world affairs, so they dispatched armed soldiers to forcibly remove residents in the “bayonets and bulldozers” campaign, which destroyed houses and flattened fields so that new bases could be constructed.

1960: U.S. soldiers marching through town in Okinawa under U.S. rule

After the war, Okinawa was placed under the administration of the United States for 27 years until the prefecture’s reversion to Japan in 1972. During this time, the Constitution of Japan did not apply to Okinawa, and the people were unable to even send representatives to the Diet until 1970.

Courtesy of the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum

Courtesy of the Okinawa Prefectural Archives

Courtesy of the Wabi no Sato Foundation

Courtesy of the Naha City Museum of History