

# Notes on Sonjuku Okinawa Trip

For the period of May 27 to 29, 2016, we the members of Shimada sonjuku and myself visited Okinawa. This trip aims at seeing the sites of American military bases, old remains, monuments and memorial facilities of Pacific War, and talking with relevant people to learn about the history of war and contemporary situation of Okinawa, mainly with respect to national and regional security function centering around Okinawa. Since learning about contemporary history of Japan ridden by wars is an important subject of study program of Sonjuku, this trip is one of the most important study trip of Sonjuku.

Because of importance of Okinawa trip for Sonjuku, class one members visited Okinawa in November 2013. I have compiled a detailed report of this trip in English shortly after the trip. Since trip this time of class two of Sonjuku followed basically the same plan of three years ago, let me confine the report of this trip to write several important points which are different from the previous trip. I recommend the class two members to read both the report of the class one trip of 2013 together with this notes.

I will first briefly explain the plan of our trip this time and proceed to write some unique and important points which are different from the previous trip.

## 1. Travel Itinerary:

May 27(Friday), 2016:

On May 27, the participants met together in the lobby of Naha International Airport at 11:00. We were welcomed by surprise my good friend, Mr.Uechi, Toshio, and Mr. Nakamatsu, Toru, of Ryukyu Village where we plan to visit in the afternoon of May 29. On 11.30 we departed for restaurant "Suidunchi" a fancy and cozy restaurant where we enjoyed Okinawa cuisine. Although the day was in the midst of rainy season, the weather was fine. The blue sky had no clouds. Local Okinawa people told us that having this much fine weather is very exceptional. It was hot too with strong sun shines just like the mid summer.

From 14:00 to 16:00 we visited Kadena US. Air force Base. The military staff led by vice commander Lieutenant Colonel Van Thai cordially welcomed us and kindly explained and showed us around the base.

From 16:30 we visited Mayor and officials of Kadena town, where they awarded me an Award for Special Contribution to Kadena town. This was highly honorable which I am deeply grateful. After the visit of town office, town officials guided us to the room in Kadena memorial hall where we had study session. I spent about a couple of

hours to explain modern history of Okinawa particularly from Meiji era to today, and particularly activity of Shimada commission which made the special arrangement for Kadena town to renovate to recreate the town as is now.

We then had a nice dinner at restaurant, Ohki Kaisanbutsu(fresh fish, shells and weeds from sea). The dishes were fresh, tasty and splendid.

We stayed over a night in a cozy hotel, Daiwa Roynet Naha Omoromachi, near the city center of Naha.

May 28(Saturday), 2016

We left the hotel fairly early at 8.00 because we will have many places to visit for this day. We first visited trenches constructed by Japanese Navy toward the end of Pacific war. This is fully explained in our early report of Okinawa visit of class one of Sonjuku.

We then visited Towar of Himeyuri( a memorial facility to remembers the sad activity of female students who served earnestly to help wounded Japanese soldiers toward the end of Okinawa war and many of them died in the war ). We also visited Okinawa Memorial Tower for Peace and Heiwa no Ishiji(foundation for peace), the latter is memorial stones on which names of some 240 000 people are engraved who lost their lives in the Okinawa war consisting mainly of Okinawa citizens as well as Japanese and even some foreign soldiers. It was an incredibly hot day with powerful sunshines. All these facilities are explained in detail in English report of November 2013.

We took a nice Okinawa lunch at restaurant Yagiya, where Sonjuku members enjoyed three years ago. This is a restaurant renovated an old Okinawa farmer's house. The restaurant is cozy and relaxing. Dishes are nice and tasty. We enjoyed local Sake well, too.

In the early afternoon, from 13:40 to 14:40 we visited Kakadu Takadai(high hill) Koen (park) from which we can take a full view of Futenma Base, a strategic helicopter base of US. marines. This base has been and is a focus of debate between Okinawa prefectural governor and Japanese government. We visited this park to take an overview of the base, partly because we were unable to make an arrangement to meet the Mayor of Ginowan, Mr.Sakima,Atsushi the city in which Futenma base is located. He responded to us earlier that he would be too busy the Saturday afternoon we told him to visit because it would be a few days ahead of Okinawa prefectural assembly election.

We arrived at Kanucha Bay Hotel and Villas shortly after 16:00. Mr.Nakamura, Eiichiro general manager and chief chef welcomed us warmly and arranged for us a special dinner looking almost "a Royal Reception" at the cozy garden in front of the hotel

overviewing East China sea. We were also able to see well the site of planned relocation of the Futenma base, namely the outskirts of US military base, Camp Schwab.

Special arrangement for the evening was that the formal governor of Okinawa, Mr. Nakaima Hirokazu, kindly visit us at this hotel to share his time to tell us what he thinks about many issues which Okinawa currently faces. I will write specially about his talk later.

Since Sonjuku members enjoyed so much of the warm welcome and splendid dinner at Kanucha Bay, and very favorably impressed by this entire facility and environment, they spontaneously expressed their wishes to come back here at least once a year. We began to think about visiting here annually to have memorable gathering of alumni as well as active members.

May 29(Sunday),2016:

In the morning as early as 7:00, those who wish to play golf started. On the way of playing, we were able to see a number of times, a just a couple of miles away, the planned site, named Henoko area, for relocation of Futenma base. For those who wish to enjoy trial scuba diving and swimming they did.

We departed Kanucha Bay and Villas at about 13:00 and went to visit Ryukyu mura( village), a sort of theme park where a number of cultural and natural assets are exhibited, and a variety of Okinawa musics, songs and dances are played. It is a kind of center of Okinawa cultural and entertainment heritages.

Having arrived the village, most of the members who visited here for the first time were guided around to see the gists of the park, and I was guided directly to go to the old and original house of Kokuba family, the family who owns much of Okinawa construction businesses. The house is currently preserved by Mr.Uechi, Toshio and his family as an important cultural heritage of the prefecture. The old house is renovated to be used for meetings of various kinds. Room is air-conditioned, which is a relief for an exceptionally hot day.

During the entertaining shows and late lunch, which was gorgeous by the way, we were surprised that Mr.Sakima, Atsushi, Mayor of Ginowan-city who told us well in advance that he would be too busy to spare time to meet us, showed up. Mr. Uechi,Toshio told us that he ordered Mr. Sakima to come to join us because professor Shimada was visiting Ryukyu-Mura and it would be unthinkable for Mr.Sakima not to join. Mr.Uechi is chairing the organization for supporting Mr.Sakima so that Mr.Sakima probably had no other choice but to follow strong advice of Mr.Uechi. This was a great

luck for us. Mr. Sakima gave us useful and interesting talk to us, which I will write specially later.

This was the final event for our trip of Okinawa this time.

## **2. Kadena Air Base and Vice Commander Van Thai**

To visit Kadena airbase, I wrote a letter of request toward the end of year 2015 through Okinawa office of Defense Ministry of Japanese government. A couple of weeks later, we received a message from an officer in charge of Kadena airbase through Defense ministry of Japan, Mr. Morita, that it was too early for them to make decision as to whether they would receive us or not. The officer in charge advised us to submit our request again in March. Their reply of receiving us at the airbase reached us in April.

Two years ago, they responded to us much more quickly. Why they spent much time before they gave us their word of reception? Since military organizations work rigorously in accordance to rules and instructions, it is hard to think that their response was delayed simply by the pace of handling this case. We wondered if the base had much more tense issues to consider, such as missiles of North Korea, this time which did not quite exist two years ago.

The officers of Kadena airbase received us and warmly welcomed us as two years ago when we arrived at the gate of the base. In the meeting room in the office of the base, the officers gave us comprehensive explanations of the size, structure, and functions of Kadena airbase. This explanation is just about the same as two years ago. Since the explanation of two years ago is reported in detail of my English report, I will not repeat it here.

Having heard such explanations, vice commander of the base, Mr. Van Thai explained to us the objectives, the mission and the types of operations and also the types of airplanes operating in the base.

At some point of his speech, I asked him as to why and how he joined American air force partly because I noticed that his name is a familiar name in Vietnam. He frankly explained to us that he is a son of a Vietnamese family who left Vietnam to reach the US seeking for opportunities of new life shortly after the end of Vietnam war. This story impressed us keenly in the sense that the US still has its great merits of accepting those who wish to come to the US openly, and provides opportunities indiscriminately as far as the candidate has a strong will, commitment and diligence. Mr. Van Thai talked highly of this virtue of the United States.

After observing F-15 jet fighters closely at the shelter, we were guided to the exit of the base which was punctually, exactly 16:00 which was promised to us well in advance.

### **3. Talk session at Kadena town hall**

After having a ceremony of receiving a special award for contributing to Kadena town from town mayor Mr.Tohyama, Hiroshi in the town office, we were guided to visit the town hall which was built as a project of Kadena renovation by the initiative of Shimada commission around 2000. On the wall of entrance to the building, there set three bronze relief of the bust of three men: Mr.Kajiyama, Seiroku, Mr. Okamoto, Yukio and myself. These bronze relieves were made and set to the wall of this hall to express the gratitude of the town for our effort of renovating the whole town and building the huge multi-purpose town hall. Sonjuku members seem to have been deeply impressed by seeing this relief.

We went to the meeting room. In addition to Sonjuku members, some members of Kaduna town officers voluntarily joined us to share time together with us to share information during the discussion session.

I tried to give them a comprehensive history of Okinawa, a quick view of contemporary history of Japan, the experience of Okinawa war, hard days of Okinawa people in the wake of the end of the war under the control of occupation army, and the terrible rape of a 12 year Okinawa girl by 3 American soldiers in 1996, protests of Okinawans, the formation of the special committee advising Chamber Minister of Japanese government on the issues of US military bases and facilities in Okinawa, in short Shimada commission, activities of Shimada commission with special reference to the Kadena project which aimed at minimizing problems arising from the large presence of US base by renovating the central part of the town as well as constructing multi-purpose town center.

While talking, I myself got somewhat excited particularly because the audience, Sonjuku members and Kadena town officers, was listening to me so earnestly, I spent almost two hours exceeding well over one hour which was planned. Some sonjuku members had tears in their eyes. They told me later that they were so much moved by my speech and was unable to stop tearing in their eyes. I was moved as well by their sincere attitude.

#### 4. Talk with Mr. Nakaima, Hirokazu

Mr. Nakaima, Hirokazu shared his time with us at Kanucha Bay and Villas Resort for a few hours between 5 to 8 O'clock. After our talk, he went back to Naha city. We talked for about an hour in a room of the hotel, and then continued our conversation in the garden overlooking the ocean having a delicious dinner sitting around a few round tables.

Mr. Nakaima started out his talk by telling the meaning of having bases in Okinawa. US military bases in Okinawa have had important share in its economy since the end of the war. Currently the bases employ about 8500 people. However, their relative importance in Okinawa economy has been declining sharply with the development of Okinawa. Currently the share of income accruing from the bases is around only 5% or so. On the other hand, accidents, crimes, noises are annoying Okinawa people. The bases also remind us of the cruel and miserable experience of Okinawa war. We admire Hiroshima people in that they somehow overcome their fatal experience of suffering from nuclear bomb, and try to seek new possibilities for the future.

In Okinawa, major political parties such as Social Grand party and others require all the bases be abolished, or be transferred to outside of Okinawa. On the other hand, the threat of China is becoming increasingly real and just around the corner. Defending against China may not be possible only with self defense force. We might need US military force to defend Okinawa.

Mr. Onaga, Takeshi used to be heading the team of election policies of Liberal Democratic Party. He all of a sudden prior to the last gubernatorial election joined Communist and other opposition parties bringing 50000 votes which would otherwise support LDP. Therefore, the result of the election turned out to be 360000 votes for him and 260000 votes for myself.

Defense secretary, Mr. Rumsfeld once said that the situation of Futenma base is dangerous for inhabitants nearby. Okinawans strongly oppose against relocating it within the prefecture. However, municipalities outside of Okinawa would never accept the base. Therefore, the place of relocation would have to be again in the neighborhood of Nago city. Chamber minister, Mr. Suga, Yoshihide once told that the government pursues the possibility to relocate the base outside the country such as to US bases in the Pacific Ocean, but so far no response from the US on this question. We have no power to change the US since we are the defeated country. We, Okinawans, asked many times to US Consul General in Okinawa to accept Okinawa base in the US. This relocation would be difficult under the rein of Hillary Clinton, either.

We always think about US bases as to what should be the most legitimate way of

allocating them. We know that defense needs bases, and also think that security is the national issue rather than a issue confined within Okinawa. Then we always think of the question as to why not the entire Japan think seriously sharing the burden of having bases which are indispensable for national security rather than simply forcing Okinawa to bear the 70% of the burden on only 2.5% width of Japan's territory.

## **5. Talk of Mr. Sakima, Atsushi**

Mr. Sakima, Atsushi joined us in the joyful reception held in the old Kokuba House of Ryukyu Village in the afternoon of May 29. This was a surprise and wonderful surprise. This was kindly arranged by Mr. Uechi, Toshio.

He said that already 20 years have passed since the decision was made by prime minister Hashimoto, Ryutaro and US president Clinton, Bill, to relocate Futenma base to somewhere else within Okinawa. To relocate Futenma base, we need other place where Futenma base should be relocated. According to the current Japan-US treaty, we need an another facility to substitute Futenma base. If no such place or facility is available, Futenma base cannot be relocated.

Mr. Donald Trump talks about withdrawal of US military from Japan. This seems a much too much far-fetched view.

Japan-US security arrangement is necessary for the sake of Japan and not for Okinawa alone. I think the whole Japanese should think about more seriously about what should be done to secure the peace for Japan as a whole.

Activists assert the bases should be located outside of Okinawa, but they never agree to accept at the place they reside. Defense minister Nakatani, Gen admits that problems of the bases are not problems of Okinawa alone. I wish Japan as a whole should think about this issue more seriously. Futenma base occupy 480ha, which is a number of times larger than Tokyo Baseball stadium. When it is relocated, we also need to think as to how to fill in its gap economically as well.

Listening his talk, we were impressed by his remark that as far as security is the national issue and not the issue of Okinawa alone, therefore why not entire Japanese think about sharing the burden of holding bases by the entire Japan more seriously. This is indeed the basic question of the problem of base in Okinawa.