

## Takae Helipad Campaign in Okinawa

Okinawa is part of a group of Japanese islands situated between Taiwan and Japan. During the Second World War Okinawa was invaded by allied troops destroying nearly 90% of all buildings and killing between 42,000 and 150,000+ civilians. After the war Okinawa was under US administration for 27 years until 1972. During this time the US established many bases on the island. To this day many US facilities still occupy a large part of the island and is home to approximately 23,000 US troops. The troops remain in Japan under a treaty signed in 1952 that was later amended in 1960. This treaty allows the United States to retain their bases, "For the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East". 75% of the United States military bases within Japan are located in Okinawa.

Residents of Okinawa are split in their opinion about the US bases. Some see the economic advantage of hosting US troops. Many residents are employed to work on the bases and others whose business benefits from their trade. However, many residents also oppose the presence of the US military sighting crimes committed on the island by the troops, destruction of the environment, noise and pollution.

There are many campaigns against military bases in Japan. Usually they work independently of each other. However they do join forces for large-scale protests when a major incident occurs. For example, in 1995 when three US servicemen raped a 12-year-old girl.

In Okinawa there is a small campaign based in Takae. Takae is a small village<sup>1</sup> surrounded by jungle at the northern end of the island within the district<sup>1</sup> of Higashi and has a population of about 150 people. The campaign is against the construction of new helipads that would be used by the US military. Many of the bases in Okinawa are aging and some will be decommissioned. But with the decommissioning, the US also wants to build new helipads in previously untouched jungle. The Japanese government, eager for the construction contracts, are willing to let construction go ahead.

In February 2006 the Takae helipad campaign began. The campaign was formed by a small number of residents none of whom had any previous campaigning experience. Between them they set up 24-hour guard at entrances to the helipad construction sites. They confronted the construction workers and blocked access to the new helipad sites. Once built, the helipads role would be used in the training of mainly US troops in Jungle warfare.

The campaigners concerns about the new helipads are related to the environmental destruction of the jungle, noise and air pollution. As well their concerns for the environment, they are also against the use of their homeland for the training of military personnel, that they will be taught about killing and jungle warfare literally on their doorsteps. There are also safety concerns after one helicopter crashed near Takae close to their elementary school in 1999. And in 2004 a US military helicopter crashed in the grounds of a university in the city of Ginowan.

The US military are planning to replace their helicopters (CH53D, CH46E...) in Okinawa with the new Osprey. The Osprey is a vertical take off and landing aircraft that can fly twice as fast, carry 3 times the current load and travel 5 times further than the helicopters in use at the moment.

The Japanese government are currently trying to apply for a Provisional Disposition against 14 of the main helipad campaigners. Originally the number was 15 and included a child, but after a public outcry the child was removed from the order. A provisional disposition can be viewed in the UK as something between an ASBO and injunction.

The affect of the court case may scare people from continuing the campaign and also to disable the campaign by punishing the main members of the organisation. While the court case proceeds the Okinawa Defence Bureau has promised not to carry out further helipad construction. However, if the court case becomes lengthy, it is possible construction may begin again before a decision is reached in court.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the UK definition of village and district. In Japan a district would be within a village, so in Japan, Takae district is actually inside Higashi village.

## 15th October 2009 – Yumiko & Paul Visit Takae



(left) View from the bus. (right) Bus terminal in Higashi

The bus ride from Nago city where we were based to Takae took about an hour. Very few buses per day run between the city and Takae so our visit was planned to a strict timetable.



(left) Road from the bus terminal. (right) Helipad campaign picket

We walked from the bus terminal to the entrance of one site where the construction of a helipad is planned. The picket consisted of one white marquee containing a table, chairs, campaign literature and an improvised sink. In the past the picket was occupied on a 24-hour rota, however, while construction is halted the picket normally ends in the evening. Construction is unlikely to take place at night so the campaigners take the opportunity to rest. Running a 24-hour campaign takes a big toll on family life and some of the campaigners found life at that time very difficult, even now the campaign uses up a lot of their otherwise free time.



(left) Red line marks the boundary between civilian and military property. (right) Entrance to helipad site.  
Note: The red line has been digitally enhanced in this photograph to enable clearer viewing.

The marquee was straddling a red faded line in the road close to the entrance of a US military site. The line marked the boundary between civilian and military land. Crossing the line does not bring immediate attention, however, military personnel can arrive and ask questions if you are spotted. Trespass on US military land can also lead to prosecution under Japanese law.



(left) Caravan for 24-hour campaigner located at another helipad site. (right) Marquee adjoining the caravan.

At 5pm we were taken to a house where we met other people involved in the campaign. One of them drove us in his van to visit other helipad pickets. Since July 2007 one man has been continuing a 24-hour monitoring station outside the entrance of one site. His home has become a tiny caravan located next to the helipad site entrance.



(left) Main entrance to a military base. (right) An evening of food and music.

We visited the entrance to several other helipad construction sites and the main entrance to a military base. A vast amount of land has been taken for US military use and in Higashi some of this land has not been fenced off. It has been reported that US troops have conducted drills outside of military land, illegally dumped rubbish and trampled sugar cane fields.

Later in the evening we were treated to a huge meal and songs by the campaigners back at the house. Their campaign, like so many, is made up of a small number of people fighting against all the odds, against powerful governments and restrictive laws. They also have to fight for the opinion of those who see the military bases making good economic sense. Those concerned with the economy perhaps do not see, as the campaigners do, that they have indirectly aided and played a part in the Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and other wars. The campaigners do not want to continue this help for future wars, they have an overwhelming spirit to carry on and not give up. And somehow they can still find time to welcome strangers and provide them with food and a bed for the night!

Report by: Paul  
Assisted by: Yumiko



Campaign Collection Box  
<http://www.konicaminolta.com/kids/animals/library/field/okinawa-rail.html>

## Useful Links

Okinawa

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okinawa\\_Prefecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okinawa_Prefecture)

Voice of Takae Leaflet

<http://okinawaforum.org/disagreeblog/VoiceofTAKAE-eng.pdf>

WWF Leaflet

<http://www.wwf.or.jp/activities/lib/pdf/yanbaru0706e.pdf>

Rape of 12 Year Old Girl in Okinawa

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995\\_Okinawan\\_rape\\_incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995_Okinawan_rape_incident)

MV22 Osprey

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V-22\\_Osprey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V-22_Osprey)

Helicopter Crash in Ginowan

[http://www.city.ginowan.okinawa.jp/DAT/LIB/WEB/1/00021\\_00003.pdf](http://www.city.ginowan.okinawa.jp/DAT/LIB/WEB/1/00021_00003.pdf)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3560944.stm>

Battle of Okinawa

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Okinawa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Okinawa)

Overview of US Bases in Japan

[http://www.jca.apc.org/wsf\\_support/2004doc/WSFJapUSBaseRepoFinalAll.pdf](http://www.jca.apc.org/wsf_support/2004doc/WSFJapUSBaseRepoFinalAll.pdf)

Japan-U.S. Security Treaty

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html>

Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article\\_9\\_of\\_the\\_Japanese\\_Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_9_of_the_Japanese_Constitution)

Takae Campaign Blog (Japanese)

<http://takae.ti-da.net/>