

The 'Rape' of Okinawa

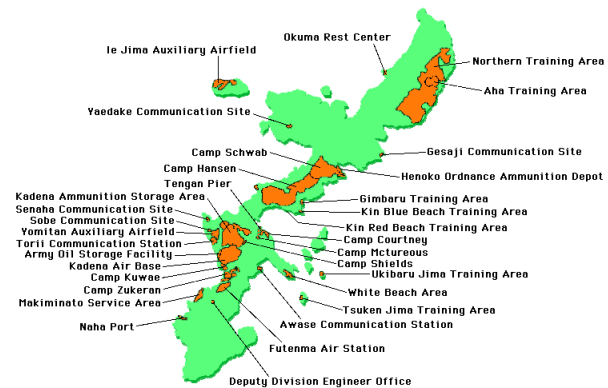
Chalmers Johnson

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It all seemed deadly familiar: an adult, 38-year-old US Marine sergeant, Tyrone Hadnott, accused by the Okinawan police of sexually violating a 14-year-old Okinawan schoolgirl. He claims he did not actually rape her but only forcibly kissed her, as if knocking down an innocent child and slobbering all over her face is OK if you're a representative of the American military forces. The accused marine has now been released because the girl has refused to press charges - perhaps because he is innocent as he claimed or perhaps because she can't face the ignominy of appearing in court.

Let us briefly recall some of the other incidents since the notorious 1995 kidnapping, beating and gang rape of a 12-year-old girl by two marines and a sailor in Kin village, Okinawa. The convicted assailants in that outrage were Marine Private First Class Roderico Harp, Marine Private First Class Kendrick Ledet and Seaman Marcus Gill. Other incidents of bodily harm, intimidation and death continue in Okinawa on an almost daily basis, including hit-and-run collisions between American troops and Okinawans on foot or on auto bikes, robberies and assaults, bar brawls and drunken and disorderly conduct.



US bases on Okinawa's main island

On June 29, 2001, a 24-year-old air force staff sergeant, Timothy Woodland, was arrested for publicly raping a 20-year-old Okinawan woman on the hood of a car.

On November 2, 2002, Okinawan authorities took into custody Marine Major Michael J Brown, 41 years old, for sexually assaulting a Filipina barmaid outside the Camp Courtney officer's club.

On May 25, 2003, Marine Military Police turned over to Japanese police a 21-year-old lance corporal, Jose Torres, for breaking a 19-year-old woman's nose and raping her, once again in Kin village.

In early July 2005, a drunken air force staff sergeant molested a 10-year-old Okinawan girl on her way to Sunday school. He at first claimed to be innocent, but then police found a photo of the girl's nude torso on his cell phone.

After each of these incidents and innumerable others that make up the daily police blotter of Japan's most southerly prefecture, the

commander of US forces in Okinawa, a Marine Corps lieutenant general, and the American ambassador in Tokyo, make public and abject apologies for the behavior of US troops.

Occasionally the remorse goes up to the Pacific commander-in-chief or, in the most recent case, to the secretary of state. On February 27, Condoleezza Rice said, "Our concern is for the girl and her family. We really, really deeply regret it." The various officers responsible for the discipline of US troops in Japan invariably promise to tighten supervision over them, who currently number 92,491, including civilian employees and dependents. But nothing ever changes. Why?



Secretary of State Rice expressed "regret" in meeting with Prime Minister Fukuda

Because the Japanese government speaks with a forked tongue. For the sake of the Okinawans forced to live cheek-by-jowl with 37 US military bases on their small island, Tokyo condemns the behavior of the Americans. Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo called the recent assault "unforgivable" and demanded tighter military discipline. But that is as far as it goes.

The Japanese government has never even discussed why a large standing army of Americans is garrisoned on Japanese territory, some 63 years after the end of World War II. There is never any analysis in the Japanese press or by the government of whether the

Japanese-American Security Treaty actually requires such American troops.

Couldn't the terms of the treaty be met just as effectively if the marines were sent back to their own country and called on only in an emergency? The American military has never agreed to rewrite the Status of Forces Agreement, as demanded by every local community in Japan that plays host to American military facilities, and the Japanese government meekly goes along with this stonewalling.

Once an incident "blows over", as this latest one now has, the pundits and diplomats go back to their boiler-plate pronouncements about the "long-standing and strong alliance" (Rice in Tokyo), about how Japan is an advanced democracy (although it has been ruled by the same political party since 1949 except for a few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union), and about how indispensable America's empire of over 800 military bases in other people's countries is to the maintenance of peace and security.



Okinawan protest at Marine Headquarters in Kita Nakagusuku village following news of the rape

As long as Japan remains a satellite of the United States, women and girls in Okinawa will continue to be slugged, beaten and raped by heavily armed young Americans who have no other reason for being there than the pretensions of American imperialism. As long

as the Japanese government refuses to stand up and demand that the American troops based on its territory simply go home, nothing will change.

Chalmers Johnson is the author of the

Blowback Trilogy - [Blowback](#) (2000), [The Sorrows of Empire](#) (2004), and [Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic](#) (2007).

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