



# FACT SHEET

## **U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet OKINAWA HISTORY**

Okinawa's early history is shadowed by incomplete and sometimes contradictory evidence. Records indicate a series of kings struggling to maintain control over fighting warlords. The Okinawa of old may have resembled medieval Europe. In the 13th Century, the lord of Urasoe, Shunten, rose above the war-hardened chieftains and established a kingdom...first in a series of historical dynasties.

With the dawn of the 15th Century, a warrior and organizer, Sho Hashi, became king of Chuzan and eventually gained control over the entire island, unifying the three kingdoms. The entire country, thereafter, bore the name of Chuzan. Sho Hashi also moved the government from Urasoe to Shuri developing Shuri palace.

In 1609, the Shimazu clan from Satsuma, in southern Japan, invaded Okinawa. For the next 270 years, Satsuma demanded taxes from the Okinawans and controlled trade in exchange for island protection. Okinawa assumed status as a Satsuma colony. During this period, Commodore Perry was reluctantly admitted to Shuri's royal palace.

England, Russia, France and the United States tried to enter treaty relations with Okinawa in the 19th Century. Apprehensive of western interest, Japan tightened its grip by sending a military detachment in 1868. Weary of Okinawan objections to its military forces, Japan abolished the royal government in 1879 and annexed Okinawa as a prefecture.

Situated on the main Japan approach, the Ryukyu Islands stood in a strategic location during WWII. By June 1944, the Japanese Army arrived in force. US forces started bombing Okinawa in October 1944. In March 1945, the first American troops landed on the Kerama Islands ... the important springboard for the April 1, 1945 invasion of Okinawa.

The Battle of Okinawa proved to be one of World War II's longest and hardest fought campaigns. Total American casualties were 49,151, including 12,500 killed or missing in action.

Japanese Imperial Army losses totaled over 75,000. Nearly one-third of Okinawa's civilian population- 100,000 people-also perished. The battle ended June 22, 1945, and Japan surrendered in September 1945.

In 1946, relief funds appropriated by the U.S. Congress initiated Okinawa's economic recovery. Okinawa established its first general hospital, civilian newspaper, bank and courts. By 1950, foreign trade resumed and a civil government was established throughout the Ryukyus as Okinawa began the long post-war rejuvenation.

A 1951 Japanese and American peace treaty authorized U.S. administrative control of the Ryukyus. The U.S. recognized Japan's basic responsibility for the islands under "residual sovereignty" and agreed to return the territory to Japan when international circumstances warranted.

On Nov. 17, 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson agreed to return the Bonin Islands. On May 15, 1972, the U.S. Government transferred administrative authority of the Ryukyu Islands to Japan. The islands resumed the status they held prior to 1945 ... the 47th prefecture of Japan.