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I Lost My Only Son in the War: Prelude to the Okinawan Anti-Base Movement

Ahagon Shoko and C. Douglas Lummis

Translated and Introduced by C. Douglas Lummis

*The following is a translation of parts of Chapters 1 and 2 of Ahagon Shoko's *Beigun to Nomin (GIs and Farmers)* (1973, Iwanami Shinsho). It describes the beginnings of the struggle between the farmers of Iejima (a small island just off the main island of Okinawa) and the US military which was trying to confiscate their land. Ahagon's memory is revered in Okinawa as the leader of that movement, though he denied that he played that role.*

Ahagon Shoko was born in 1903 (or "probably" so; according to him his father may have changed the date on his birth records to save him from the draft) in a village on the Motobu Peninsula of Okinawa Island. His family was poor but educated, and claimed an aristocratic background. From an early age he showed himself to be a restless spirit. Seeking an education he traveled as far as Kyoto, worked for a time for a minister there, and converted to Christianity at age 17. At 22 he traveled to Cuba, escaped from the exploitive company that recruited him, and worked in the sugar fields there for five years, followed by another five years in Peru. Back in Okinawa, he moved to the island of Iejima, just off the tip of Motobu Peninsula, and opened a small general store, which apparently prospered. According to his own account, he was considered something of a crank in those days. Then the war came: on April 16, 1945, the allied forces invaded Iejima Island, and in the ensuing battle half of the residents were killed. The following selection begins there.

In this translation the names of the Americans are retranslated phonetically from the Japanese, and so there is no way to be sure of the spelling. 'Sheehan' and 'Johnson' are probably correct, as is 'Captain Hook' (though it seems too good to be true). On the other hand 'Cox' might be 'Koch', and 'Rabbit' seems unlikely, though it's interesting to think of one of these GIs as a character from an Updike novel.

The person referred to as the Chairman was the titular head of the mostly powerless Okinawan government, which at that time operated under the rule of the US Military. C. Douglas Lummis

I lost my only son in the war. Although he wasn't old enough yet he was conscripted and taken to Urasoe on the main island, where he was killed. The details are not clear. My wife says she still has the feeling that he will come home, and she is not yet resigned....

Also my brother in law, my wife's grandmother and grandfather, brothers and sisters and many other relatives were killed. Of the 1500 households on Iejima, there is hardly one in which there were no victims.

In no household do they talk of the war. It was so painful that merely recalling it is enough to make you lose consciousness.

The villagers of Iejima were made prisoners and taken to the Kerama Islands. That was where that devil, Captain Akamatsu, had given the command for mass suicide. Six young people from Iejima were among Akamatsu's victims. They were ordered by the U.S. military to go to Akamatsu's camp under a white flag with a proposal that he surrender, but Akamatsu arrested them and killed them on the spot. We learned this from the fact that they never came back, and also from information we got from survivors.



From Kerama we were moved to Nakijin, and then to Motobu and Ishikawa. And then, whenever the GIs at Motobu and Ishikawa moved, the villagers again had to move with them. Finally in March, 1947 we were returned to Toimi on Iejima, but were able to return to our homes at Maja only at the end of that year.

Of the about 100 households at Maja before the war, only 75 returned. But we put the suffering of the war behind us and turned our energies to farming, and since we had on the average one hectare of farmland per family, as compared to an average six and a half *tsubo* on the main island, we were comparatively well off, and putting this advantage to good use we raised our productivity higher than the other villages on the island, and for four years between 1949 and 1952 we received the first prize flag from the Industrial Exhibition (産業共進会)。

Maja was well on its way to recovery, and to a settled life. We thought, let's forget the war, it is enough if we have peace. It was just then that an unhappiness equal to war, an unhappiness even greater than war, came to Maja.

The basis for our troubles had already been set up before we got back. Unbeknownst to the farmers of Iejima, while we were away 63% of the island had been confiscated by the U.S. military for their use. Three airstrips had been completed, including the one that had been originally built for the Japanese military. With this accomplished, now the U.S. military wanted to pay the farmers consolation money [in Japanese the ironic expression is *namidakin*: "tear money"] and use the rest of the land they had confiscated as a training area.

Finally returning home in 1947 after a war experience so horrifying that no one would talk about it, then struggling against real starvation, finally achieving a recovery to normal life around 1953, the farmers of Maja were able to enjoy the fruits of peace for only a fleeting moment.

Like the people of all of Okinawa, the farmers of Maja do not talk of the war. Simply remembering is so painful it could drive you mad. Similarly, people do not like to talk about the time after the war when the U.S. military invaded and took their land. Everyone is silent about it. The people of Maja fought back. More than that, they suffered.

But now I must tell the story.

The Farmers of Maja and the Petition Regulation

The Beginning of the Land Problem

It was July 19, 1953. A Nisei named Goto, who was with the land department of the U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyus, came to Maja saying that he was a land surveyor who had surveyed land in a variety of places including Korea, and that he had come to investigate the land at Maja. He looked over the land and left. I was away from the island when he came, but when I heard about his visit after I got back I thought nothing of it.

Then on July 24 he came back again to Iejima, saying he wanted to look at the land once more. At that time the people of Maja still trusted the Americans, and so the Village Head Oshiro and seven other villagers cooperated and showed Goto around. Then he asked them to put their seals on some English documents, saying that they would be paid later for their day's work, and they affixed their seals without any suspicion. Later they were astounded to

discover that the documents were agreements to evacuate their land, but at the time they had not the slightest idea that this is what the documents were.

There is a background to this. During the war we were taught the slogan "destroy the English and American devils", and that while to die at home lying on a *tatami* mat was a dog's death, if we died on the battlefield we would be worshipped in *Yasukuni* shrine. If we were taken prisoner we would have our eyes and noses gouged out and then be massacred. Pretty girls would be assaulted, and so for them to be killed right away by their parents with a hatchet or a club would be a happiness - and in fact there were some parents who killed their daughters. But then when the war ended the American Pacification Unit came, and not only did they not cut off our arms and legs, they handed out canned goods, smiling like former Ambassador Reischauer, and protected us from the unpredictable GIs.



**Jap Surrender Team.
IE SHIMA 1945**

The farmers, who until then had been treated like dirt, for the first time came to see value in American democracy and in the words of Lincoln. America had won, so there would be no more war, whereas if Japan had won there would have been war again. In the Battle of Okinawa which began in April, 1945, on Iejima with its population of 7500, 1500 civilians, 2000 Japanese soldiers and 800 American soldiers were killed, in a situation so cruel you can only avert your eyes. Starving in the ditches, where we were attacked by fleas and lice, it was beyond imagining. Only if there is no war, everything will be fine. At the time I was a blind believer who was happy to believe in the Americans, and when my brother, who had been to college, said that there was something wrong with American colonial policy, and that it was going to bring us trouble, at that time I had no idea what he was talking about.

But I began to understand when, in June, 1954 the U.S. military, saying "We will allow you to continue farming, if you suffer any losses we will compensate you, this will not interfere with your life, rather with the compensation money you will live better," gave the Maja families of Chinen Kokichi and Chinen Hana, and the Nishisaka families of Gima Matsuzo and Shimabukuro Koko five days to evacuate their homes and move to specified locations.



Site of the bulldozed Ahagon family home.

The places that the four families were ordered to evacuate to were not far from where they lived. We only learned it later, but apparently this was a test by the U.S. military to see how much resistance there would be to relocation. At the time they gave no reason for the evacuation order, and I didn't believe that they were going to use that location as a training area. In those days the farmers were still innocent, and while they inclined their heads and asked, "I wonder what they are going to use it for?" they believed that, if they resisted the U.S. military, Iejima would never recover, and that rations distributed by the GIs would be cut off, whereas villages that cooperated would be favored and would recover quickly. And so the four families of landowners (the owners of the property) uneasily agreed to evacuate, and not a single person in Maja objected. However when the promised generous payment for moving turned out to be a mere 20,000 yen, and the landowners took their claim to the Civil Administration, they were turned away with the comment, "20,000 yen is plenty compared to 5000 yen."

And though they were told they were free to continue farming, not only were they not free to farm, every time they planted something it would be burned up in the military exercises.

This was the beginning of the land problem. After that the situation developed rapidly, and our view of the U.S. military soon changed.

On September 27 of that year a military land advisor named Smith (a big, rather charming fellow, tall, with a red face and white hair, in his forties) and a land requisition officer named Sheehan (fat, with a carefree face, contemptuous, who never got angry and never changed his opinion, in his thirties), along with an interpreter and two or three other soldiers came to the village office.

The interpreter was the nisei Goto, who had come before. He was a large, dark skinned man around thirty, contemptuous of Okinawans and with a face that announced him as a citizen of the victorious country and bespoke of the heavy responsibility of acting in loyalty to America. When he entered the office he said [in broken Japanese] "Good morning everybody, how are you, Iejima girls very good looking, I like, I take Okinawa girl for wife" and so on, joking, singing, dancing. And to the landowners, "You farming too hard, take money go to Naha rent house, eat good food, get rich easy, farming no good, your head be potato head" and on and on, frolicking and dancing around the office. I was reminded of the cruel method used in the days of Lincoln, where the slavemaster Legree along with Sambo and Kimbo would sing and dance at the slave market to liven up the slaves so they could be sold at better prices.

On that day the military, through interpreter Goto, informed village head Oshiro Takekichi that they were requisitioning 1,500,000 *tsubo*, an area 5000 feet in radius, and that 152 families were to evacuate their homes immediately. (Later the military said it was 3000 feet; their figures were haphazard.)

Seven days later, on October 4, seven GIs came. They always came by airplane. At that time the city office was a forty-*tsubo* building built after the war out of American lumber, the roof was made of shards of red tile that had been broken during the war. Inside was a single bare room with no partitions, and the tables, chairs and bookcases were all junk thrown away by the US military. Still, it had a wooden floor, and villagers and employees always took their shoes off before entering, but the US soldiers always came in with their shoes on. They were truly unmannerly, and somehow threatening.

At one o'clock, with a map of Iejima spread out on the table, and through a small interpreter, 24 or 25 years old, who barely spoke Japanese and who could have been Japanese or Korean, we had the following conversation. Present were six from the U.S. military, the Village Head and his assistant, five from Maja including the Township Head, and six from Nishisaki. I was among those from Maja. All the memos and records from that meeting have been preserved, and so it is possible now, twenty years later, to give an accurate account of what took place.

Military: (pointing his finger at the map) This area is going to be used by the military, so no agricultural products are to be brought in. Everything on the ground that is within this red line should be taken outside.

Village Head: Take it outside, and what should we do then?

Military: We'll tell you later. Concerning assessment of value, we'll decide that later. That you will evacuate is decided. What you do next, we'll tell you later. The military assesses money for moving expenses only. Don't think you are going to get more.

Expenses for moving graves we see at 100%. Expenses for moving water tanks we see at 100%. You can take them out. The military has done evacuations many times, our assessments are accurate.

Village Head: Outside of here there isn't any other land, so it will be hard to move out.

Military: (pointing on the map to a place on the north shore where the Japanese military had an ammunition dump during the war) What is this?

Village Head: You can't farm there. There is no water, and the ground is stones; it's not a place where you can make fields.

Military: If it is hard to live make a plan and inform the Civil Administration. We understand that it is hard. Find fields where you can farm and let them know.

The military land survey will be done on the fifteenth of this month. Can we meet with your representatives on the fifteenth at the Judicial Department of the Ryukyu Government? What time will be good?

Village Head: The fifteenth between two and three will be fine. And we request that there be no evacuation.

Military: That is impossible. Thank you for your help in our survey of the village.

Saying this, the soldiers left in their airplane a little after four.

This was an emergency. On the fifteenth, Village Head Oshiro and officials from Maja and Nishisaka left for the government offices carrying a petition requesting discontinuance of the evacuation. When they arrived in Naha they went without eating to meet with the Chief Secretary, the Home Affairs Secretary, and the Chairman of the Military Land Federation. All promised to "do their best to achieve a good result". This was the first time anyone from Iejima had come to the government offices since the war, and they also visited the legislature building. But they discovered that the people who until then they had thought were great figures displayed in their words and in their actions a fear of the military and avoided making a clear statement, which made them feel chagrined, and made them think that these people were to be pitied rather than to be counted on.



Photograph Jon Mitchell

When we learned that the petition we had brought earlier had not yet been translated, but was stuck in a drawer from which the official there took it out for us, the irresponsibility of this, and the fear it showed of the US military, disillusioned us greatly.

The party that arrived back at Iejima from Naha at six that evening held a meeting at the Nishisaki township office. In that *tsubo* office with its walls full of holes the whole village gathered, but only half could get inside, so people stood in the doorway and outside under the eaves.

We were amazed to discover that the government doesn't know anything about the Iejima land problem. We shouldn't think that just because we lost the war we can't stand up to the US military; we have to solve this problem no matter how much negotiation it takes. The land right is with the landowners, and whether we evacuate or not is something we will decide. After these and other impressions and opinions were given the meeting was opened up for questions.

Q: Has there been a meeting in the legislature on the land problem?

A: Not yet. (Someone says "The Village Head isn't trying hard enough.")

Q: I heard that after the land survey the GIs went around telling people to put their stamps on documents, but is that true?

A: That is true. The GIs who said they were done with the survey and the interpreter went around coercing people.

The meeting adjourned at eight in a mood of uneasiness.

The problem became bigger, deeper, and more pressing. On October 7 Oyama, chairman of the Ryukyu Government's Land Committee and eight members of the legislature came to the island and held a meeting at the Nishisaka township office.

The villagers all made appeals to them. In those days everybody was wearing US military "darky clothes" (that's what we called them) and nobody was shaved. The following is extracted from the record of that meeting.

Oshiro Man'ichi (52, Nishisaka): Last June the US military bulldozed under 3000 *tsubo* of sugar cane, sweet potatoes and soybeans. This has put ten families into great trouble. The US military made a survey for compensation, but so far no one has received one *mon* of money.

Ishikawa Kiyotomi (62, Maja): They do military exercises without telling anyone, and bombs are dropping everywhere. Still we are not going to evacuate this place, so please appeal to the military not to evacuate us.

Asato Shoei (58, Maja, an outstanding farmer): After losing the war and experiencing every kind of suffering, just when we had the happiness of being able to return to the island and to a settled life then again this happens. We will not be able to give our children an education. Please, allow us to live. I beg of you.

Chinen Kokichi (28, Maja. He had been a Soviet prisoner of war in Manchuria, and then, while imprisoned in the Soviet Union, jimmed open a lock with a nail and escaped the day before he was to be executed. Originally from Ibaragi Prefecture, a member of the Manchurian Volunteers): The only time we can be in our fields is before eight in the morning before military exercises start, and in the evening after four. That isn't even enough time to pick the crops that are ready for harvest. 3000 *tsubo* of watermelon fields were burned up by bombs, but I haven't gotten one *mon* from the military. Their behavior is unbearable.

Ahagon Shoko (52, Maja): Begging your pardon, we farmers understand nothing about orders and directives, but we need to stay alive. We would like to cooperate with the military, alive. As to humanity and morality, I think there is no difference between America and Okinawa. So I ask you in the legislature, please follow that way when you speak.

The landowners, men and women together, entreated, "Please, please" with pathetic voices, and then trudged heavily back to their homes.

When Ahagon said we know nothing of orders and directives, he was speaking the truth. At that time we had not read the orders and directives issued by the military; we hadn't even known that they existed.

The response that Oyama Chojo, Chair of the Legislature's Special Committee on Land, gave to the farmers' pleas was deliberately vague: "You should think it over well, and then either look for some place to move to, or else, if you are going to stay - I have to mention that possibility - then I can't tell you what you should do."

The next morning, after seeing the government officers off at the wharf, the township officials gathered and consulted on what to do.

1. It is because we put too much trust in the U.S. military that we are facing this problem. That is the cause of it.
2. We will ask the Chairman to come to the island himself, see the problem with his own eyes and hear the voices of the landowners directly. And we will ask him to explain to us the meaning of the orders and directives.
3. We will carry out our petition in a legal and humanitarian manner. We will keep our solidarity to the end, and no matter what happens, fight on to protect our land, so as not to be evicted from it.

Looking again at the notes I took at the time, I see that in addition to the facts I recorded there is writing in red ink between the lines. I don't remember which parts I wrote then and which later, but anyway that is something I can't leave out of this account.

For example on the same day, October 8, on the four o'clock passage from Toguchi of the village-owned boat Iemaru, there arrived the Interior Affairs Bureau Chief of the Ryukyu Government Miyasato Sho, the Administrative Section Chief Noha Tojiro, the Administrative Secretary Nakamoto Choi, the General Affairs Section Chief Kakazu Saburo, as well as reporters from the Okinawa Times and the Ryukyu Shimpō. They met with the Village Head and people from both townships, but where I wrote down the Interior Minister's initial greeting there is written between the lines in red ink,

"The greeting was form only, showing no sincere sympathy."

And the following outline of the greeting by Administrative Section Chief Noha is written entirely in red ink:

"We can well imagine your feelings. And we cannot but feel sympathy. We have no words with which to apologize to you. If we look for the cause of this unhappiness, I think we will find that the fault lies in the war. The government wants to do all that it can, but please understand the position the government is in now. Please understand the position Okinawa is in, and don't only worry, but also act. Just now I was scolded for offering only tears of sympathy, but I am sincere. Forgive me. I will communicate your wishes directly to the Chairman. Please take care of yourselves."

The talk of "tears of sympathy" was a response to Ishikawa Seiken of Maja, who was unhappy with the government and who had shouted angrily, "We don't need your tears of sympathy! We want to appeal directly to the Chairman and to the U.S. Military and bring these evictions to a halt!" Noha's response to this - "I am sincere" - was half sincere and half evasive.

The next day the Bureau and Section Chiefs were taken in a farm co-op truck on an inspection tour of the two townships, guided by the Township Heads and other representatives. They visited Ujabarū, Gohezubarū, Yamanakabarū, and Kijakubarū, and saw that all the land that could be cultivated had been cultivated by its owners, and all the rest was covered with stones because of the airport construction.

It was made clear that there was no other place for the people of Maja and Nishizaki to live or to farm. Chief Noha and the others were forced to recognize that this was so, and had no words in response. Trapped between the farmers and the military, they set themselves to trying to soften up the farmers.

Oct. 12, 12:30. At the Village Office there was a meeting of members of the Village Council, the Village Land Committee, and some of the officials from the two townships. The Chair of the Village Council Tamashiro (later to become Village Head) addressed the group, saying that the seizure of land was a concern of the entire village; that the whole village should rise up and join together in support of the petition, so as to bring it to a halt. The Chair of the Land Committee Maeda Kosuke (64) said, "We in the Council and the Land Committee were surprised to learn about this only the day before yesterday. This is a huge problem for the Village."

So finally the land problem of Maja and Nishizaka Townships became a problem for the village as a whole.

Then they all got in the farm co-op truck and drove out to Toimibaru in Maja, which the Military wanted to take as a firing range. In the area they wanted there were fields green with sugar cane, wheat and potatoes, there were forested hills and uncultivated fields to provide material for compost and feed for animals and firewood. One after the other the Council and Committee members criticized the Military's highhandedness, saying, "You come out here, your stomach is full without even eating, correct? If we owned this land, we would never leave it. The Military is talking irresponsible nonsense. We have to use the strength of the whole village to stop them." (In the notes I took at the time, everything after "There were fields green with sugar cane" is written in red ink. It is because between the peaceful ways of farmers and the violent ways of soldiers there is a contradiction, and that was the essence of the problem.)

When we got back to the Nishizaki Township office many people were gathered there. After a few words from Village Head Oshiro, we were given the following explanation from the Ryukyu Government's Industrial Section Chief Tamashiro Tetsuo:

According to the notification from the U.S. military, 78 families (that is, all families) were to be evacuated from Maja, and 74 (from a total of 142) from Nishizaki, for a total of 152 evacuations. Evacuation investigations had been completed for 116 families.

Everyone felt that the problem was rapidly closing in. Council Chair Tamashiro addressed the group as follows:

"The first time the Village Council was given official notice of this was October 10. We had no idea that the matter would become this big. This is a truly serious problem, for which we have no precedent.

"The land that the Military is scheduled to confiscate amounts to 1,700,000 *tsubo*. Within that 488,000 *tsubo* are under cultivation. In addition it includes forested hills and fields that are essential to farmers. The Council's position is that it will petition in accordance with your will. Everything depends on the will of the landowners. We believe that Chairman Higa will do his utmost. We also expect that the CIC will be coming around, so please exercise great caution; we don't want anyone being led astray by the CIC.

The farmers cried out one after another, "We are standing on the boundary between life and death! Taking a farmer away from the land is like taking a fish out of water - there is nothing left but to die!"

On October 13 at 5pm Kuwae Choko, Chair of the General Land Committee of the Ryukyu Government, the Vice Chair and three other officials arrived on the island. A meeting with the landowners was held at Nishizaki. The more contact there was with the outside, the more chances the farmers had to express their opinions, and to organize their thoughts and put them to the test.

Namisato of Maja (this old man later threw himself in front of a US military bulldozer with his hands joined in prayer, was beaten, tied up with rough straw rope, then wrapped in a blanket so the rope couldn't be seen and taken to the military court at Kadena) made the following appeal:

"I have a family of seven, and everything has been destroyed right to the middle of our fields. Now we have neither tea nor tobacco. Soon the winter winds will come. I am no longer afraid of bullets."

Chinen Hirokichi of Maja took up Old Man Namisato's words and declared, "If we are afraid of bullets, then our whole families will die."

Oshiro Yukichi of Nishizaka asked, "Is it better to have a lot of landowner's names on the petition?" But Chairman Kuwae said, "That I cannot answer."

In my notes the following is added in red ink:

"As for clothing, government officers, legislators, Land Liaison Committee members all came to the island dressed up splendidly in the garb of officials complete with neckties, yielding nothing to the Americans. This was because the U.S. military in Okinawa judged people's character by their clothes. But whether it was to impress the Americans or whether it was to keep up their dignity before the farmers, their appearance seemed wasted on the ragged and emaciated farmers, and was completely out of harmony.

"The farmers, on the other hand, were all dressed about the same. They were all happy to wear floppy GI hand-me-down "darkie clothes". Or rather, they were not at all conscious of what they were wearing. Nor did they pay any attention to what the officials were wearing. They only gazed fixedly at the face and the eyes of the speaker in a spirit of entreaty, with nothing at all in their minds but whether it was possible for the seizure of their land to be prevented.

"The women had their hair tied up artlessly with old towels; there was not one with a permanent wave. Eight out of ten, both men and women, were barefoot. Four-, five-, ten-year old children, and also middle-school youths, sharing the fear and anxiety of the adults, surrounded the officials and listened silently.

"There was no table anywhere, and the officials spoke standing with the people crowding at their feet and looking up at them. The officials carried out their responsibility without energy or confidence or hope, and the words they forced themselves to say had neither warmth nor sincerity."

After Chairman Kuwae and the others left, the villagers remained and talked over the best way to present their petition to the Military two days hence.

1. Keep your eyes on the GIs at all times.
2. Keep your spirit keyed up.
3. Engage in no idle talk with the soldiers while the talks are going on.
4. Maintain good manners.
5. If a solution is reached, we should pay calls on Interior Department Chief Miyasato, Administration Section Chief Noha, Chairman Kuwae, the members of the Special Committee on Military Lands, and others to convey our thanks.

These and other ideas were discussed, and the meeting broke up late that night.

The next day, October 14 after 5 pm, five Americans and an Interpreter named Shimabukuro came to Ahagon's house saying they were Christian missionaries, spent about 15 minutes there making small talk, and left. Ahagon supposed they were probably CIC, but gave no more thought to it.

The Meeting with the Military

October 15, 1954. Fair. The day arrives when the petition is to be delivered to the Military. At 9 am, led by Village Head Oshiro, about 80 men and women from both townships boarded the two village-owned boats, Iemaru and Iemaru II. They were wearing mostly GI surplus clothes, shod variously in rubber boots, army boots and *geta*, and carrying bundles wrapped in cloth. When we arrived at the harbor at Toguchi about 40 minutes later, two buses that had been sent by the government were waiting. For many of the farmers this was the first time that they had ridden on a bus. After returning to Iejima from the US prison camps at Kerama and Henoko, they had been busy working to restore both their own lives and village life, and there had been no opportunity to leave the island, nor reason to do so. There were some who had never even seen a bus before. No doubt the government expected that as soon as the

farmers got on the buses they would go into an ecstatic trance, and forget all about the present business of carrying a petition to the Military.

The Village Head and the other leaders kept silent, their faces somber. Now they were going into the fight. What should they do, who had never fought the Military before? What kind of place would it be? What should they say? With their minds fully occupied with what was to come in three hours, by the time they got to the US base at Kadena they were in a daze. Driving by this airbase, the pride of the military, said to have no equal inside the US, they felt they were passing by a foreign country. At 1 pm they arrived at Naha. Many of the women were seasick and carsick.

Carrying their cloth-wrapped bundles on their arms and led by the Village Head, the group arrived at the government building. The Village Head inquired at the Chairman's office, and learned that the meeting was to be on the third floor. But when they started up the stairs, they were told that only the Village Head and one representative of the landowners would be allowed up, and that all the rest would have to wait downstairs. To this the people raised a protest, saying it was too cruel to keep them out after they had come all the way from an outer island with a petition, and demanded to be let in. Finally six representatives were admitted, while the rest were told to wait downstairs. At 2 pm the meeting began.

There was Judge Cox from the US Civil Administration and, together with Captain Hook about ten from the Military, all in uniform and lined up ominously. The Village Head and the others, in their ragged clothes, sat down. They were filled with anxiety, but their determination never to let go of their land shone in their eyes. From the Ryukyu Government there was the Chairman, the Chief of the Judicial Department, and Administrative Section Chief, and also some newspaper reporters. We learned later that the Chairman had been told by the Civil Administration that he need not come, but that he had insisted on coming anyway.

The interpreter was an American woman, about 27 or 28. The meeting began. As one of the US military men made an opening statement, the people who had been left downstairs could be seen crowding outside the glass door, silently gazing at the proceedings within.

The interpreter spoke.

Interpreter: As for the purpose for which the land is to be used, it is to be used for the defense of the Ryukyus. We want to hear from the Village Head what plans you have made for evacuation.

Village Head: I will answer that after I have heard an explanation from the Military.

Civil Administration: At first we only evicted one part [indicates four houses] but only that is not enough to ensure safety, and that is the reason for the present problem. When we realized the danger we expanded the number of evictions. We want to hear what plans the Village Head has made to deal with this problem, and after hearing that we will think about what to do. At the present moment, nothing is clearly decided concerning the evictions. Nothing is decided at present, but we made an investigation for the purpose of learning what demands would arise, and what kind of aid we should offer, should the time come.

Now I request the Village Head to tell us what you want to tell us.

(The US Military always says things that make no sense. Their strategy is to say nothing clearly, use up the time, and send you away.)

Village Head: When the Air Force told the landowners it wanted to use their land, we answered that if we leave there is no other land for us to go to.

Civil Administration: Neither on the island or off the island?

Village Head: That is right.

Civil Administration: What about off the island?

Village Head: There are children and old people among us, and we are not going anywhere. If we were to move it would amount to close to 1000 people. This is not a matter that can be dealt with by a village head, and so we are asking for the intervention of Chairman Higa.

Civil Administration: If you have no clear plans for evacuation either on or off the island, then stay where you are. Continue cultivating your fields until our plans are clear. At this time we will not say that you must evacuate. Continue cultivating your fields as before. Mr. Ogden [the military Vice-Commander] and Mr. Johnson [the Civil Administrator] often accept difficult situations.

Village Head: If there is no eviction, there is nothing to be said.

Civil Administration: There is no eviction order at present, but we want you to make plans for what to do in the event that one is issued in the near future.

Military Land Officer: At the Land Office we have not yet received any eviction papers.

Air Force: If the landowners insist on continuing to live there despite the danger, what will you as Village Head do when actual danger comes?

Village Head: I will look into that.

Air Force: On October 4 I came and spoke at the Iejima Village Office representing the Air Force. And I want to thank you for taking the trouble to come here today. You will remember that at that time I said that the Air Force wants to use, plans to use, that land. And the [evacuation] plan that we asked you to make at that time, did you bring it?

Village Head: As Village Head I was not able to go into that question.

Air Force: We want you to think about what you are going to do when the time comes to evacuate.

The meeting ended at 4 pm. The farmers group then went to the public hall at Sakae-cho in Mawashi City (now part of Naha) that had been rented by the Ie Village Association in Naha. In the plaza in front of the hall Oshiro reported the contents of the meeting to the people who had been kept waiting outside.

"We have understood from today's meeting that the Civil Administration exists for the sake of the people. And the Air Force thinks only of the Military. But in the end the Military said we can continue using our homes and fields as before. Judging from what they said, I think the Air Force has other plans, so please put your full energy back into farming.

"In dealing with this problem you landowners have acted with true sincerity, and I think the gods have understood this and have given us their answer.

"After the meeting when I met with Chairman Higa, he told me that if we take this problem to any of the political parties that will only confuse things and make a solution more difficult. But if we leave it up to the government it can be solved more quickly. I believe his words have an important meaning, and I think we should trust him and count on his efforts."

The Village Head sent a telegram to the Village Office saying, "Solved. Be at ease. Village Head." The landowners rejoiced as if in a dream, and could not sleep that night.

But it turned out that this was unfounded, what we call "rejoicing over rice bran." Before a month had passed we received another eviction notice from the Military, and realized for the first time that we had been deceived.

The Petition Regulations

I want to set down with as much detail as possible the events between the April eviction of four households and the November Petition Regulations.

During the war we were treated brutally by the Japanese military. As a result of that, we at first saw America as the country of democracy, the country where Lincoln had lived, and we trusted it. At first, even when we couldn't understand the Military's orders and directives, even when we confronted them in meetings, we thought that though the Military was fearsome the US Civil Administration must be on our side.

I myself also thought so. I had blind faith in them. But little by little, as America betrayed us, our eyes were opened. Again and again we were betrayed, until in our rage we thought, we can retreat no more. Though not in the way the government meant during the war, they are devils after all. They bite. We must take care not to be bitten. If they are devils, how should we fight them? If they are beasts, we are humans, and beasts are no match for humans. We will teach them what humans are.

I learned from America. When they want something, they try one means after another to get it. Sometimes they come as devils, sometimes as angels, sometimes as snakes. They put on a performance. So we must also use one means after another to protect our land. At first we believed that if we approached them in full sincerity we would get through to them. But then two missionaries disliked by the Military, Rickard and Burberry, came to Iejima and told us, "The military decides everything on the basis of what it needs and what it doesn't need, on the basis of their own gain and loss."

After that we began to learn how to get the better of them. When they came to the island and spoke wildly about how they would kill us with poison gas or shoot us down with guns, we went directly to the newspaper office and had their words published, making the devil's behavior public and bringing shame down on the US military.

It is because we fought that we learned these things. If we hadn't fought, our minds might have stopped in the same place as that of Yokoi Shoichi, the former Japanese soldier who was found hiding in the jungle in Guam in 1972. Or maybe we would have been even worse.

From the day after the meeting with the military, the farmers went back to cultivating their land, which had been uncared for since September and was getting overgrown with weeds.

And, filled with hope, they began repairing their houses and opening new fields on land that had been trampled hard under US encampments during the war, land where each *tsubo* yielded a wagonload of stones.

Then just a month later, on November 15 at 3 pm, the US Military Land Officer Sheehan and an interpreter came to the Village Office. The Village Head was not there.

Sheehan: If the Village Head isn't here I can't go into details, but we came today to do an investigation. Do you have the name list from the last investigation?

Assistant Village Head: The Village Head is not here, and I don't know. In the future please don't come here directly, but talk to the Chairman first. That is the proper legal procedure.

Sheehan: I've already talked to the Prime Minister, but I came here today to give the Village Head directly some advance warning. That's the reason I came.

The farmers from both townships were outraged, and wondered whether the Military had deceived them or whether they had forgotten the promise they had made a month before. That night both townships held meetings and decided that if another land survey began they would come out in full force to prevent it. And they also appointed a group to take another petition to the government the next day. The members were [list of names follows].

The next day this group first visited Isahama at Ginowan Village (now a city) in the center of Okinawa Main Island, which had had a land problem before Iejima did. There they met with Village Councilman Takashi Yasuyoshi, who had been at the center of the opposition struggle, to learn from him about methods of protest. There they learned how the Military had used every kind of strategy - showing up early in the morning or in the middle of the night, threatening and coaxing, trying to deceive people by giving them presents. The group from Iejima were relieved to hear that if the US Military arrested people they did not execute them. (But later when the US dispatched troops to Iejima, this [minimal] confidence of the villagers of Isahama and Iejima was proved to have been misguided.)

On the 17th the protest group arrived at the Ryukyu government offices. At 9 am Village Head Oshiro and Section Chief Noha climbed the stairs to meet with Sheehan. They returned about forty minutes later, looking worried. With an anxious face Oshiro told us, "A terrible thing has happened. Yesterday the Military went to the Island to make a survey, and 400 people came out to obstruct them, and pulled up the survey stakes. I have just been given a very angry reprimand by the Military." Noha sat with his body wilted and his head drooping, saying nothing.

Ahagon said, "Well, this sounds serious. But I don't believe that the people of Iejima really obstructed the survey. I think they must have tried to make an appeal. I don't believe that those mild-mannered people could stand up to the Military. There must be some mistake, so please don't worry."

At that time I didn't know the word "provocation", but I thought there was something suspicious going on.

That afternoon we met Miyasato, the Interior Minister of the Ryukyu Government.

Miyasato: If the Japanese Military had been obstructed like that, it would have meant real trouble. You have to look at the good side of the American Military.

Landowner: We don't want the American Military to be like those militarists who ruined the country.

Miyasato: You are not on an equal footing with them, so it would be better if you let them do the survey.

Landowner: We understand. We will return and see what happened. All we want to do is to preserve our lives. We have no thought of obstruction or bargaining.

The landowners remembered what had happened before. Their earlier petition had ended up stuck in a drawer, so they could not count on this one receiving better treatment. So they went to the Administrative Section and asked what had happened to it. The workers in the section all began rushing around looking for it, and finally found it in somebody's drawer. The landowners were rendered speechless with amazement and disgust at the government's irresponsibility and lack of interest. We also could read clearly in the faces and attitudes of the government workers the fear that if they said anything kind to us and the Military found out about it they would lose their jobs.

November 20, 9 am. All the townspeople of Maja came to the town office to hear the result of the petition. In those days there was one meeting after another. In the process the people came to understand how crafty the US Military is, and also that the Ryukyu Government could not be depended upon. At the same time their own resolve strengthened.

Oshiro, the Village Head, gave the following report:

"First there was a meeting between me and the Administrative Section Chief and Smith and some others from the Military. The meeting was closed, and no reporters or farmers were let in. I was told that the military survey team had been obstructed by 400 farmers and that the survey could not be carried out. The same thing was reported in the newspapers the next day, and so I apologized.

"The military said they sympathized with the farmers, but if you obstruct them it will not be in your interest in the long run. Sunday is their day off, but they said they would be back on Monday to survey, and that we should not interfere."

But then the real story of the "obstruction" was given by Nosato Takematsu (a small, energetic old man with salt-and-pepper hair, from Maja). On the 16th the survey was doing much damage to the crops, and so the farmers said to the interpreter, "Please stop. Please call it off until the Village Head and the farmers' representatives get back." That was all. It happened at the plaza, and they made the request sitting down, because they were hungry. It was no more than an appeal: please let us live.

At the same meeting Ishikawa Seishoku (white hair, about 70) said, "Rather than evict us it would be better if they would gather us all in one place and just kill us off all at once. I want the Village Head to tell the military that."

Ahagon spoke as follows.

"In carrying our petition this time, the Village Head has made efforts beyond the call of duty. And he received a reprimand; it has been a very hard time for him.

"I have been thinking. Why was the Village Head reprimanded? Whose fault is it? It is the fault of the Military for trying to take away our precious land for nothing. If they didn't take away our land we'd be too busy even to gather for meetings."

Then after saying how disappointed he was at the irresponsibility of the government, he continued as follows.

"The position of the Chairman is like that old harlot's song. 'Better than the love of the rich samurai is the love of this one, who loves from the heart.' He has to obey the Military to keep his position and his livelihood, but also he can't just stand by and watch us die. Remember this is Chairman Higa, who was a middle-school teacher before the war, and who is good at English. Surely he doesn't think it is all right for us Okinawan farmers to be killed. But it has become a money world, and we can't expect him to work for us.

"Now friends, true cooperation means to cooperate with the just behavior of forever-prosperous America; it does not mean to cooperate with the kind of militarization that brings the country down. Perhaps some of you think it is futile to oppose the US Military, which even the Japanese Military couldn't defeat. But we have a teaching in the East. The Sage says "非理法權天": Unreason yields to reason, reason to law, law to power. One should conduct oneself according to heaven's way.

I believe our resistance is just. I believe that the gods and the Buddha will lend us strength. Let us take courage based on our conviction, and protect our land."

The villagers, clinging to hope in the midst of their anxiety, adjourned the meeting.

After that events began to move even more rapidly.

On November 22 and 9:30am, US Military survey team leader Warrant Officer Rabbit and seven or eight others arrived by airplane. Also two policemen, and Police Officer Uehara who was stationed at Ie, the Village Head, Land Committee Chair Maeda, Council Chair Tamashiro, and many farmers from both townships were present. The following exchange took place.

Beginning with the Village Head, all the farmers said, there is a petition under consideration right now, so please call off the survey. But Rabbit refused, saying, "I have come all the way from Korea to Iejima to do this survey, and I have no authority to call it off. I am only following orders."

Finally Rabbit left for the survey site. About 150 villagers gathered, broke up into groups of 14 or 15 people, and surrounded each member of the survey team and entreated them, "Please don't do it, please, please." This continued until 3pm, without a break for lunch.

Then somebody got the idea, how about expressing our request not only with words but with things. So from the several households we gathered together about 40 or 50 eggs, and said, "Please listen to our request. There aren't many, but these are raw eggs from our village. The Military doesn't have such a thing, does it? Please take them." Rabbit accepted them in good spirit, and immediately called off the survey.

The villagers were relieved, but made one more request. "We want to meet the superior officer who gives you orders, but we have neither the money nor the energy to leave the island. And even if we went to where your superior officer is, he wouldn't meet with us. But we want to meet with him and have a good talk with him. Could you please bring him here?"

Rabbit's obstinacy vanished, and he took on a friendly attitude. "That will be easy," he said. "I can't do it tomorrow, but the day after tomorrow without fail I will bring you lots of superiors, so please wait for me."

The farmers all bowed, and Rabbit left after four. The farmers, exhausted and pale, saw him off.

However on the following day, one day before Rabbit's "promise", there was an eerie roar, a medium-sized airplane landed at one of Iejima's three airstrips, and some GIs and a Japanese-American got out. They looked too proud and arrogant to be a work team. Some villagers greeted them with a "Good morning", and asked them why they had come. From the experiences that had been coming down on them one after another, the villagers knew they were dealing with "devils". But if they are devils, we are humans. Humans offer greetings: "Good morning" when it is morning, "Good day" when it is midday,

"Good evening" when it is evening. So when we meet devils, let us offer them greetings too. Let us greet them whether they respond or not. This was the foundation, and the frame of mind, of the lejima struggle.

And making these greetings often resulted in the GIs being quite beautifully entrapped by the farmers' leading questions.

GI: We have no business with you. We are different from yesterday's survey team. We came to deliver the communications troops on lejima their pay.

And with that they walked arrogantly and affectedly over to the western quonset hut (that's their name for the *kamaboko* huts) where the communications troops were housed.

The Village Head, the School Principal and the Council Head hurried after them. And before ten minutes had passed they learned that these Americans who said, we have no business with you, we came to deliver paychecks, were in fact Walker, Kusumi Shoko and others of the Kadena Office of Special Investigations (OSI).

GI: We have come from Kadena OSI to investigate the incident of the 16th. Who is it who pulled up survey stakes and obstructed the survey? If you don't tell us you will all be in trouble.

But in the face of the facts given him by the Village Head and the farmers, Walker was in the end unable to fabricate a riot. So in the end he said, "When we get back we will question the survey team again, but it does seem to be a fact that tires were slashed," and with that exit line, departed.

The farmers were saddened by the Military's attempt to change their entreaty into a case of violent obstruction, and also by the newspapers which, whether under military orders or whether they actually believed the military's story, had written about the "obstruction incident" without knowing the situation or coming to look. With pale faces and heavy steps, they returned to their homes.

But beyond that, this cheap and arrogant behavior of the Military, saying we have no business with you, we have come to deliver pay, and then ten minutes later saying we have come to investigate an obstruction incident, led the honest farmers to ask disgustedly, Is this the behavior of the American gentleman? And in the end it rid them of the last traces of their respect for the Americans, and replaced it with spite.

We farmers saw ourselves as having full value as first-class Japanese citizens, and were confident that, spiritually, we were far superior, and from that time forward we ceased to fear even the American high officials.

That afternoon after 1 pm a group of twenty-some people gathered at the home of the Nishizawa Township Head Oshiro Yukichi, and on the basis of what had happened so far, drew up a set of "Petition Regulations".

Petition Regulations

**Do not become anti-American.*

**Do not become angry and speak insultingly.*

**Say nothing to the GIs other than what is necessary. Behave properly. Speak absolutely no lies or falsehoods.*

**Always remain seated at meetings.*

**When meeting with the US military, never carry baskets, sickles, sticks or anything else in your hands.*

**Do not raise your hands above your ears. (If we raise our hands they will say we used violence, and take photographs.)*

**Never raise your voice; speak quietly.*

**Always negotiate in the spirit and attitude of humanity, morality and religion. Do not be led astray by orders and directives based on mistaken law, but always make your appeal on the basis of what is right.*

**Never be afraid of the Military.*

**Hold fast to the conviction that we farmers, as producers, are superior in humanity to the soldiers, and maintain the frame of mind that it is up to us to educate the soldiers, who are destroyers.*

**These regulations, which are for the purpose of winning our appeal, are to be maintained to the end.*

The above is hereby agreed.

The landowners of Maja and Nishizaka.

(To be signed and sealed.)

After that we agreed to the following petitioning policy.

**If the Village doesn't pay the expenses of petitioning we will be unable to continue, so immediately bill the Village for expenses.*

**It seems that the Military is trying to find a way to put our leaders in jail, so warn all villagers always to obey the Petition Regulations, and to set up no established leaders or representatives.*

**Those farmers who have lost their land by being evicted from the firing range should tell the Military directly, and not through representatives, how they don't have enough to eat, and should demand compensation.*

**In choosing representatives the appropriate person should be selected for each occasion.*

**When holding discussions and making appeals, request to the Military that these encounters take place in front of all the villagers.*

**When the representatives are done talking, the villagers themselves should speak from their own standpoints.*

**The Military tries to have meetings with as few representatives as possible, in a closed space, and for as short a time as possible, and we should do our best to resist this.*

**Even when the Military comes with a highhanded and arbitrary attitude, we should maintain the manner of human beings and first-class citizens, and even if we receive no politeness from them we should never forget to offer them proper greetings.*

**For interpreting or for witnessing [their interpreter] we should go through the Village Head and call upon Uchijima Takegi, the Junior High School Teacher.*

The Petition Regulations were only put on paper in their final form around 1960, and today an abbreviated version is inscribed on the back wall of Solidarity Hall (completed in 1970). But the first Petition Regulations were just a record of what we talked about, written down on a scrap of paper.

People from mainland Japan ask us, who first thought of the Petition Regulations; who first put them together? But nobody did. "Let's offer them greetings" (In Okinawan dialect, "Aisatsu sabira") was the foundation of the Iejima struggle, the Maja struggle. As for myself, I was weaker than the others. That was because I trusted America. Up to then I had blind faith. My family was small and we were well enough off, and I can remember overhearing people say, "He might skip out, we mustn't let him get away." And I can remember saying to the others, "I will do as you do, tell me what you are going to do." At that time I had opened a little variety store at Kawahira, down near the harbor and far from Maja, and so unlike the others I wouldn't be without food from the day my land was taken. So in a lot of ways I was weaker than the others.

So if you ask me who wrote the Petition Regulations, the answer is, I don't know. There isn't much difference among the people of Maja. When you farm, your knowledge and ability get to be about the same. So even if I said I was the first to suggest it, it was everyone's idea. It may be that I acted as a kind of counselor, and made some suggestions or proposals, but thinking back on it today it is strange to me that we could have put such a thing together then.

Two or three years ago a young man who came over from the mainland said that "petition" is too mild. Petitioning is not really fighting, was his idea. I explained it to him this way. "I don't necessarily think it was a splendid fight. But here on this isolated island, where there are no support groups, no newspaper reporters, no one watching, no one listening - if we are killed here, it's all over. So there was no other way."

A non-resisting resistance: prayers, pleading, *higan**, entreaty, these are what I earnestly promoted.

**higan*: a Buddhist prayer for all mankind.

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See the accompanying article on Ahagon Shoko and the Iejima resistance to US confiscation of land:

Jon Mitchell, [Beggars' Belief: The Farmers' Resistance Movement on Iejima Island, Okinawa.](#)

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