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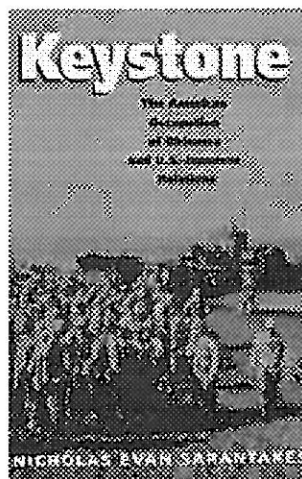
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MARINE CORPS GAZETTE

The Island in the Corner

reviewed by Robert V. Hamilton

KEYSTONE: The American Occupation of Okinawa and U.S.-Japanese Relations. By Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX, 304 pp., \$34.95. (Member \$31.50)



This well-written and informative book detailing the American occupation of Okinawa from 1945 to 1972 is also helpful in gaining a better perspective on the present-day U.S. military situation on the island. Marines—especially officers en route to Okinawa—will find this book useful. Better yet, throw it in your seabag and break it out a couple of months into your tour of duty in order to get a good historical background on some longstanding issues still affecting the Marine Corps on Okinawa.

Nicholas Sarantakes, an assistant professor of history at Texas A&M-Commerce, plots out the story in an interesting and well-researched narrative style. Actually, a more accurate title for this book would be “Okinawa, American Turf Battle in the Pacific.” The turf battle over Okinawa begins with the American forces slugging it out against a tough Japanese foe in April 1945, while the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps also do some infighting amongst themselves. However, the real focus of this book is the bureaucratic turf war that occurred within the U.S. Government after the fighting ended. Sarantakes gives an evenhanded account of the 27-year American occupation and explains nicely how the Americans finally reconciled national security concerns with the sovereign rights of their Japanese defense partner—resulting in the reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1972.

One turf battle pitted the Department of Defense against the State Department. At one point the Pentagon wanted outright annexation of Okinawa for use as a permanent U.S. military base to carry out a “double containment” strategy, meaning containment both against communism on the Asian mainland and containment against Japanese remilitarization. The State Department, in favor of reversion, countered that such a policy would be viewed by the world as imperialist, would be

that such a policy would be viewed by the world as imperialist, would be very expensive to administer, and might even incite Japanese public opinion against the United States.

Sarantakes gives an amusing account of the rivalry between the U.S. Army general that was “high commissioner” of occupied Okinawa and the American ambassador to Japan in the early 1960s. He quotes *The Washington Post* that:

So bitter is the feud between the State Department and the military over the question of Okinawa that the High Commissioner frequently withholds important information from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo and embassy officials have been known to exaggerate grossly reports of the military’s autocratic rule.

Sarantakes writes that the ambassador described the Army general as a “rigid, bull-headed man,” and the high commissioner countered that “the Ambassador was useless in almost every case. He’s useless. He’s a menace, because he thinks he knows everything. He has a lot of information, and he knows nothing.”

In an item related to current affairs, Sarantakes writes that in 1946 the U.S. Navy had cooled to the use of Okinawa.

Naval interest in the island had declined in recent months after a typhoon the previous fall convinced strategists within the service that developing ports on the island was no longer wise.

Fifty-five years later, the same concerns are heard regarding the building of a floating U.S. military air facility off the coast of Okinawa.

Another kind of turf war occurred between the Services in the 1950s. The U.S. Air Force focused on building up its massive Kadena Air Base, whose military value increased due to its importance for bombing missions during the Korean War, while the U.S. Army used Okinawa mostly as a logistics and supply base. Sarantakes writes that an Air Force general at the time boasted to his Army friends “in a light-hearted way that his service had bested theirs in getting better contractors and plots of land.”

In the competition for prime real estate in the 1950s, the Marine Corps was a day late and a dollar short. Marines arrived on the island in mass only after the end of the Korean War and were left scrambling for resources to base the newly arriving 3d Marine Division. While the Air Force had built a kind of serviceman’s paradise around its air facilities at Kadena, the fresh-off-the-boat Marine Corps became “Okinawa’s slum dwellers,” in the words of the *New York World Telegram and Sun*. Lack of adequate housing wasn’t the only problem, and Sarantakes writes that “in September, 1958, (venereal) diseases incapacitated 37 percent of the (3d Marine) division.”

My main complaint with this book is that Sarantakes throws no stones

and breaks no windows. He errs on the side of playing it too safe when analyzing and drawing conclusions on the American occupation. However, he does provide the context in which the Marine Corps later followed the Kadena Air Force Base's lead in successfully building a little America within the gates of its military bases in Okinawa. Today, this fairly magnificent edifice is replete with family friendly amenities such as shopping centers, fast food restaurants, daycare facilities, scuba shops, and auto hobby centers—just to name a few. This is the real legacy of the occupation, and this large modern-day baggage train has become quite expensive to maintain. A related issue not directly confronted by the author was whether the costs, burdens, and distractions associated with the occupation duty affected the fighting abilities of the 3d Marine Division. This division is still worth discussing today in the context of the continued Marine Corps presence on Okinawa.

>Mr. Hamilton is a former Marine officer who spent 2 years stationed in Okinawa and lived in Tokyo for 2 years while serving as a National Science Foundation Fellow from 1996–98. He currently resides in Alexandria, VA.

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