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Report from Naha: The U. S. Consuls General and the “Okinawa Problem” in the 1950s

Robert D. ELDRIDGE**

Abstract

The Consul General in Okinawa was in a decidedly unique, if not trying, position during the period of U. S. administration of the Ryukyu Islands, and particularly during the 1950s. As the local State Department representative, he was responsible for, among other duties, reporting on the local political scene as well as on the frictions that developed between the local population and the U. S. military, which was charged with the administration of the islands. Despite their being at the forefront of this clash or “conflict” in military/strategic requirements and political/diplomatic considerations in America’s policy toward Okinawa, there are no studies on this important position and the persons—their backgrounds, views, policy influence, etc.—filling it. This paper, based on recently declassified U. S. documents and interviews conducted with the former consuls general, attempts to shed light on the demanding activities of the consul general and policy recommendations made at the time to give a fuller understanding of Okinawa in the postwar U. S.-Japan relationship.

Keywords : Okinawa, Consul General, U. S. military, base problems, Okinawa Problem

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Introduction

Despite the so-called “Okinawa Problem” being a major issue in postwar U. S.-Japan relations and the focus of frequent news reports, surprisingly little systematic research exists to date on this important subject.¹⁾ In the few studies available, inadequate attention has been given to the people—their backgrounds, views, influence, etc.—involved in policy-making with regard to Okinawa. This is particularly true for the U. S. Consuls General, despite their being at the forefront—literally—of what this writer has called elsewhere the clash or “conflict” in military/strategic requirements and political/diplomatic considerations in America’s policy toward Okinawa.²⁾

The Consul General in Okinawa during the period of U. S. administration of the Ryukyu Islands (1952–1972) was in a decidedly unique, if not trying, position.³⁾ Although Japan possessed “residual sovereignty” over the Ryukyu Islands, the United States (on behalf of the Allies) was given “the right to exercise all and any powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction.” Because of this complex and eventually untenable situation, a “reversion movement” developed in Okinawa, the main island of the Ryukyus, greatly affecting the local political dynamics and administration of the islands and complicating the fragile U. S.-Japan relationship. The Consul General, as the local State Department representative, was responsible for, among other duties, reporting on the local political scene as well as on the frictions that developed between the local population and the U. S. military, which was charged with the administration of the islands (but was doing a poor job).⁴⁾ Because the Consul General had communication lines with Washington independent of those of the Army, the reports that emerged

1) An earlier version of this article was presented at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Oral History Association, “At the Crossroads: Transforming Community Locally and Globally,” held from October 11–15, 2000 in Durham, North Carolina. The author would like to thank, in addition to the interviewees, others who assisted in this study such as Dr. Higa Mikio, who worked for the U. S. Consulate in the 1950s, and Nakamoto Kazuhiko. He is grateful to the Eisenhower International Affairs Institute for support in this research.

2) See Robert D. Eldridge, *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem: Okinawa in Postwar U. S.-Japan Relations, 1945–1952* (New York: Routledge-Garland, 2001).

3) The United States occupied Okinawa from 1945 to 1952, and then administered the islands from 1952 to 1972 as per Article 3 of the Treaty of Peace with Japan (signed on September 8, 1951).

4) Several articles critical of the military’s administration of the islands can be found from the 1950s, suggesting the atmosphere at the time. Four examples include: Otis W. Bell, “Play Fair with the Okinawans!” *Christian Century*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1954), p. 32; Helen Mears, “Okinawa: Orphan of Conquest,” *Nation*, No. 183 (November 3, 1956), pp. 15–18; Robert Trumbull, “Okinawa: ‘Sometimes Painful’ Lesson for Us,” *New York Times Magazine*, Vol. 40, No. 16 (April 7, 1957), p. 29; Barton M. Biggs, “The Outraged Okinawans,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Vol. 55, No. 12 (December 1958), pp. 56–60.

provide a rich and contrasting view (vis-à-vis the image portrayed by the military authorities) of Okinawa in the 1950s and the problems in U. S. policy toward Okinawa at the time. Importantly, these reports also provided the State Department, thousands of miles away in Washington, D. C., with invaluable information that was introduced into policy discussions and decisions, often serving, the author suggests, as voice of moderation in America's administration of Okinawa.

After discussing the creation and functions of the Consulate General and the individuals who were appointed Consul General from 1952 to 1960, I identify how the Consul General, as the State Department representative, perceived events at the time and how (or to what degree) he sought, and was able, to influence policy.

This article is based not only on declassified U. S. diplomatic documents, journalistic reports, and Okinawan accounts, but importantly also includes the contents of interviews conducted with the four Consuls General—Thomas H. Murfin, John M. Steeves, Olcott H. Deming, and Byron E. Blankinship—two of whom have since passed away.⁵⁾ It is not meant to be a complete study—only a book could fully examine the complexities of the era, the demanding activities of the Consuls General, and policies pursued. Instead, it is hoped that by introducing, however briefly, the until-now unexamined role of the Consul General, and the issues he faced, a fuller understanding of Okinawa in the postwar U. S.-Japan relationship can emerge.

The U. S. Consulate in Okinawa

In September 1951, the Treaty of Peace with Japan was signed in San Francisco bringing a formal end to the state of war between Japan and the Allies. As is mentioned above, while Article 3 of the treaty gave the United States administrative powers over the islands, this was not meant to be a permanent arrangement.⁶⁾ Indeed, because chief negotiator John Foster Dulles created a "window of opportunity" by allowing Japan to

5) Technically speaking, Murfin's title was not "Consul General," but "Vice Consul." The remaining three were of Consul General rank. Since the interviews were first conducted, Steeves passed away on October 1, 1998 at the age of 93, and Murfin died on January 22, 2000, after a long battle with leukemia. The interviews conducted with the above Consuls General form the first stage of an ongoing (and self-funded) Oral History project recording their role in Postwar Okinawa through today, something which surprisingly has not been done to date on either the U. S. or Okinawa/Japanese side. I am hoping to eventually donate the transcripts of the interviews with all of the surviving Consuls General to the newly constructed Okinawa Prefectural Archives, as well as to possibly place them on-line as well in order for as many researchers as possible to have access to them.

6) Eldridge, *op. cit.*, particularly chapters 7 and 8.

retain sovereignty, discussions over the islands' disposition continued within the U. S. government suggesting that they could be returned by the time (or at least shortly after) the peace treaty went into effect on April 28, 1952. To the U. S. military however, Okinawa was strategically vital. Moreover, there were emotional attachments to the island following the great losses of American soldiers in taking Okinawa in one of the bloodiest battles of the Pacific War and thus the military strongly resisted its being returned to Japan. Indeed, for many years, military officials had actually called for permanent U. S. control over the islands and even their annexation. Needless to say, the Japanese government feared precisely this and desired that the islands would be returned at the time the peace treaty went into effect or as soon as international conditions permitted. Intense discussions between State and Defense representatives continued until April 28, 1952 (the day the occupation of Japan officially ended); however State was not able to overcome the opposition of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Discussions would continue in the summer and fall, but without success. It would take 20 years before the islands were finally returned in 1972.)

With Okinawa's fate undetermined, before the formal occupation of Japan ended, a "Consular Unit" was established in Okinawa in January 1952 to perform consular services for the more than 20,000 American servicemen and their dependents in Okinawa. The Consular Unit was initially under the Office of the United States Political Adviser to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), and would shortly become a part of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo operations when the embassy reopened.

The title "Consular Unit" is rather unique. Simply stated, it is a name for U. S. representation abroad, but in this particular instance, it seems to have been so titled to satisfy the military.⁷⁾ In other words, U. S. military authorities, many who continued to argue that Okinawa should be permanently separated from Japan, believed that designating the State Department's representation in Okinawa a "consulate" would signify that Okinawa was indeed a part of a foreign country (Japan) and would not become a territory of the United States (which is what many in the military desired).⁸⁾

7) The office was also known as the POLAD office at this time more out of habit it seems than of any actual organizational reason, but gradually the use of consular unit and consul general became more common. How and why this transition in name took place is not clear from the available records.

8) Interestingly, a similar debate existed on the Japanese side in which questions emerged as to whether it was appropriate for the Foreign Ministry, which deals with foreign relations, to establish a liaison office in Okinawa (in the summer of 1952), because Japan had "residual sovereignty" over the islands. Eventually, the liaison office was placed under the control of the Prime Minister's Office (Sorifu). See Ishii Michinori, "Nanpo Renraku Jimukyoku Secchi ni Itatta Keii to Secchigo no Gyomu ni Tsuite (On the Background to

The military, simply put, was apprehensive of the State Department, as well as its argument that Okinawa was a part of Japan and should be returned to Japan.

It was in the middle of this "suspicious environment" that the first consul, Thomas H. Murfin, was sent to Okinawa, staying there for more than two years, until mid-1954. Symbolic of the military's distrust of the State Department, and disregard of its representative, 36-year-old Murfin was initially ignored and not invited to functions where his presence was probably necessary, and it took many months for him to gain the grudging acceptance of the military.⁹⁾ It is doubtful that many in the State Department therefore were envious of Murfin's job. The same was probably true for his successor, John M. Steeves. However, Steeves, ten years senior and more trusted by the military, expanded the Consul General's advisory functions and was able to increase respect among the military for his office.

Steeves' successor, Olcott H. Deming, further increased the advisory functions of the Consul General, but was distressed that the first High Commissioner (Lieutenant General James E. Moore) with whom he worked (and who was unpopular among the local residents) did not seek more to use that advice, which he obviously could have used.¹⁰⁾ The second High Commissioner (Lt. Gen. Donald P. Booth) went further to benefit from that advice, but it was on an *ad hoc* basis.¹¹⁾ Deming and State Department officials, worried about local reactions to the military's handling of events, sought to institutionalize the advice of the consul general by creating a political adviser's post, or POLAD.¹²⁾ They eventually succeeded and on January 1, 1960, Byron E. Blankinship became POLAD, leaving his position as Consul General, which he became in August 1959 after Deming left for the United States.¹³⁾

the Establishment of the Southern Areas Liaison Office and the Functions of the Office After Its Establishment)," *Nanpo Renraku Jiho* (Report of the Southern Areas Liaison Office), Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 1953), p. 6.

9) Interview with Mrs. Thomas H. Murfin, July 1, 2000, Seattle, Washington.

10) Moore, who had been Deputy Governor since March 5, 1955, served as the first High Commissioner from July 4, 1957 to May 1, 1958.

11) Booth, who was much more popular than Moore among the local residents and viewed as more liberal, served from May 1, 1958 until February 1961. Booth's successor, Lt. General Paul M. Caraway (who served from February 16, 1961 until August 1964), on the other hand, was very unpopular and tried to undo Kennedy's "New Okinawa Policy" set forth in March 1962. The position of HiCom continued until Okinawa was returned in 1972.

12) For an excellent study of the POLAD institution, see Jon Lippitt Boyes, "The Political Adviser (POLAD): The Role of the Diplomatic Adviser to Selected United States and North Atlantic Alliance Military Commanders," (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Delaware, 1971).

13) Some of the High Commissioners sought to significantly use their POLADs, others less so. Blankinship continued in his post as POLAD until late August 1961. He was succeeded by Gerald Warner, a long-time observer of Okinawa and Japanese affairs, and brother-in-law of U. Alexis Johnson, a high-ranking State Department official (and later U. S. Ambassador to Japan), who helped move forward discussions on the .

While not the subject of this article, the role of POLAD to the High Commissioner continued until Okinawa was returned in 1972. During that time, the Consul General in Okinawa continued his responsibilities for consular affairs and as the State Department representative in Okinawa, varying between those with specialty in consular duties and those with expertise in political-economic matters.¹⁴⁾ A brief discussion of the backgrounds and careers of each of the consuls general follows.

The U. S. Consuls General in Okinawa, 1952-1960

A) *Thomas H. Murfin (1952-1954)*

Murfin, the first U.S. Consul to Okinawa, was born in Sunnyside, Washington on July 7, 1915 and received his degree in Business Administration at the University of Washington at Seattle in 1938. Among other jobs in pre-World War II America, such as with the Washington State Progress Committee and the Department of Labor, Murfin also worked as an editor for a weekly newspaper, a company run by his publisher-father, Arthur.¹⁵⁾

When World War II broke out, Murfin joined the Navy as a Lieutenant, later studying Japanese, in which he had had a childhood interest, at the Boulder, Colorado Japanese language school operated by the Navy.¹⁶⁾ Later serving in the Pacific, he was on hand during the Battle of Okinawa in April 1945. From April 3, two days after fighting started, Murfin began serving in the Naval Military Government, assisting Okinawan civilians displaced by the bombing and later that summer at the relocation camps in the north of the island. Murfin continued his work with the Naval Military Government until April 21, 1946, when he returned to the United States. During that time, he earned a reputation for diligence in his work, and kindness and concern for the

reversion of Okinawa during the 1966-1969 period

- 14) W. Garland Richardson succeeded Blankinship as Consul General in June 1960. Richardson's successor, Richard W. Finch (1962-1965), was of Consul rank. The position continued to be filled by those of Consul rank until 1972, when it became the Consulate General again, and headed up by Consul General Richard W. Petree.
- 15) State Department *Biographic Register*, 1955; Author's interview with Thomas H. Murfin (hereafter Murfin interview), January 7, 1999, Seattle, Washington; "Thomas Murfin: Ground-level Diplomat (Obituary)," *Seattle Times*, January 29, 2000. (Through the author's introduction, Murfin's personal papers have been donated to the Okinawa Prefectural Archives.)
- 16) Murfin interview; "Thomas Murfin: Ground-level Diplomat (Obituary)," *op. cit.* The Japanese Language program at Boulder produced many of the postwar Japan experts in literature, academia, military, and diplomacy, including Richard B. Finn and Marshall Green.

local inhabitants.¹⁷⁾

In June 1947, having successfully passed the Foreign Service Exam, Murfin was appointed to the diplomatic service and in October he was sent to Tokyo to work in the Political Adviser's office of Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur.¹⁸⁾ In May 1949, Murfin was appointed vice consul at Yokohama, some 30 miles south of Tokyo, which, along with Kobe in Western Japan, was the only U. S. Consulate office in occupied Japan at the time.¹⁹⁾ During this time, Murfin went to Okinawa twice to perform consular duties.²⁰⁾

In January 1952, the Consular Unit in Okinawa was established and Murfin and his wife, Julie, and children moved to Naha that month. Murfin had "a strong feeling toward Okinawa and welcomed the opportunity to go back."²¹⁾ They would remain there until June 24, 1954, at which time they returned to Washington so that he could assume duties at the department in October. There, Murfin was involved in Okinawa and Japan-related affairs, but only briefly.²²⁾

B) John M. Steeves (1954-1956)

Born in North Dakota on May 6, 1905, Steeves, like Murfin, also attended school in Washington, after having spent most of his childhood in Alberta, Canada.²³⁾ Steeves graduated from Walla Walla College, a Seventh Day Adventist school, with a major in

17) W. Gordon Ross, *Why to...Okinawa?* (North Quincy, MA: The Christopher Publishing House, 1971), 52-55. Murfin was later thanked for his services during this desperate time by the villagers. See *Okinawa Times*, May 4, 1967. Murfin's dedication to helping displaced persons would continue after his retirement in 1973, when he assisted refugees from China and Southeast Asia. See "Thomas Murfin: Ground-level Diplomat (Obituary)."

18) Interestingly, a colleague of Murfin's at POLAD, Neal H. Lawrence, who arrived in Tokyo at the same time, also had a very similar experience, having served in Okinawa in the military government and later joining the Foreign Service. Interview with Neal William Henry Lawrence, December 13, 1997, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo; also see Neal H. Lawrence, "Okinawa: Battle and Regeneration," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Fourth Series, Volume 12 (1997), pp. 1-17.

19) Consulates were later opened in 1950 in Sapporo, Nagoya, Fukuoka, and a smaller office was opened within the Diplomatic Section of SCAP headquarters. An office in Kobe had already been established (reopened) in 1947.

20) Letter from Thomas H. Murfin to author, September 28, 1998.

21) Murfin interview. He added, half-laughingly, that he "didn't think anyone had a strong desire to go."

22) Murfin did eventually return to Japan as Consul General (Tokyo) in 1962, continuing until early 1970. In 1984, as part of a Christian organization-sponsored tour, he also visited Okinawa.

23) John M. Steeves, *Safir (Ambassador)*, (Hershey, PA: private publisher, 1991), pp. 1-37. In addition to his self-published memoirs, Steeves conducted an Oral History interview with the John F. Kennedy Library on September 5, 1969 and a second one on March 27, 1991 with the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program, preserved at the Lauinger Library, Georgetown University, and sponsored by the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am indebted to Charles Stewart Kennedy, director of the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program, for introducing me to Steeves, and for his encouragement in this project.

Organic Chemistry in 1927. That same year, he went to India as a missionary, later serving as a principal in the school system there.²⁴⁾ He eventually assumed responsibility for all of the educational work in India, Burma, and Ceylon.

Steeves' long association with South Asia came in especially handy when World War II broke out. Feeling the call of duty, Steeves decided to return to the United States in order to receive his commission—in effect breaking from the pacifist-oriented mission work to which he had belonged. He was subsequently assigned to the Psychological Warfare Unit of the Office of War Information in India in 1943 where he remained until the spring of 1945. In late August 1945, Steeves was assigned to the State Department as "Outpost Manager for the Far East," followed by three years in the Near East and Africa Division. In May 1948, as part of the Manpower Act established by Congress in 1946, Steeves entered the Foreign Service. In August of that year, Steeves was sent to New Delhi, India, as Counselor for Public Affairs. In August of 1950, Steeves was detailed to the National War College, which had been set up in 1946 and "conceived as the senior of the various mid-career educational establishments of the armed services." Upon graduation from the program in the spring of 1951, Steeves went to Tokyo that June as First Secretary and Counselor, beginning his first real contact with Japan (although he had passed through Japan on his way to and from India). During this time, he often received Murfin's dispatches from Okinawa, drawing up reports for Washington based on them, and was thus very much acquainted with events there.

Steeves' stay in Tokyo was interrupted in the summer of 1953 when he was asked to assume the position of Acting Ambassador in Djakarta, Indonesia, which, at the time was "a mess," as Steeves recalled later.²⁵⁾ After a home leave in late 1954 and early 1955, Steeves was reassigned to Japan, where he became Consul General in Okinawa, arriving there in the spring of 1955. He would continue as Consul General until early 1957, upon which time he became POLAD to the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific, Admiral Felix Stump, in Honolulu. In this capacity, he continued to be deeply involved in Okinawa and Japan-related affairs, particularly in light of the fact that the Ryukyus Command would come directly under Admiral Stump's headquarters in the reorganization that took place in 1957. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs from 1959 to 1961, he would also be in a critical position to observe and

24) Steeves' years in India are covered in detail in Chapter 4 of his memoirs.

25) Steeves, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

comment on Okinawan affairs.

C) *Olcott H. Deming (1957-1959)*

Deming, Steeves' successor, also had experience in Tokyo before his appointment as Consul General in Okinawa. While he would go on to have a distinguished career and serve as Ambassador to Uganda and Chairman of the United Nations Committee on Decolonization, Deming curiously (and perhaps unfortunately) was not placed in a position relating to Okinawa affairs upon his departure from Naha in 1959, despite his reporting having probably been among the best of the Consuls General this author has examined.²⁶⁾ In an interesting footnote to history, Deming's son, Rust M. Deming, served as DCM, and then *Charge d'Affaires*, during and following the recent problems in Okinawa, followed by a couple of years as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. Because of his father's work, the younger Deming had spent his summers in Okinawa, and was thus quite familiar with the history of the problem there.

The senior Deming was born in Westchester, New York, on February 28, 1909, and was raised in Connecticut.²⁷⁾ He graduated from Rollins College in Florida in 1935 after spending a summer in Europe following his junior year. From 1935 to 1937, Deming did graduate work at the University of Tennessee, while working at the Tennessee Valley Authority as a research assistant. Subsequently, Deming returned to Connecticut where he worked as an instructor in Spanish, French, and English in Fairfield, and led student groups to prewar and wartime Europe in 1938, 1939, and 1940 as part of the Experiment in International Living program. In the summer of 1941, Deming joined the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, headed by Nelson A. Rockefeller, working on scientific and educational cooperation with Latin America. In 1943, he was recruited by the State Department to serve in its Latin American Affairs Bureau and subsequently began working for the Interdepartmental Committee on Scientific and Cultural Cooperation.

In 1947, as part of the same Manpower Act from which Steeves benefited, Deming joined the Foreign Service, receiving his appointment in the spring of 1948. That

26) In addition to our interview, Deming conducted a 43-page oral history with the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program at Georgetown University on April 20-21, 1988 (hereafter Deming Interview, FAOHP).

27) State Department *Biographic Register*, 1951; Deming Interview, FAOHP.

summer, he was sent to Bangkok, Thailand as First Secretary and Public Affairs Officer. In 1951, Deming went to the Embassy in Tokyo as Deputy Public Affairs Officer, observing first-hand Japan's return to the community of nations following the end of the Allied occupation in 1952. In 1953, Deming left to join the State Department's Bureau of United Nations Affairs, where he worked for four years. In early 1957, "without much prior notice or expectation," Deming was designated Counselor of Embassy, Tokyo, and Consul General, Naha.²⁸⁾ He would serve there two years, a period which was very difficult but also saw a great improvement in the atmosphere thanks in no small part to his own efforts. As mentioned above, Deming, despite his excellent reporting and apparent concern for the situation in Okinawa, would not be involved with Okinawan affairs upon his return to Washington to the Bureau of African Affairs.

D) Byron E. Blankinship (1959-1960; POLAD, 1960-1961)

Deming's successor, Blankinship, too had rich experience in Spanish and Latin American affairs. Like Deming, he too was sent to Okinawa "just out of the blue, without any real briefing."²⁹⁾ And finally, like Deming, he would have no responsibility for Okinawan affairs upon his departure in August 1961 to become Consul General in Amsterdam (beginning in 1962).

Blankinship was born on June 2, 1913 in Portland, Oregon and would live in the area until he graduated in 1935 from Pacific University, a school established in the 1840s west of Portland. Having majored in History, Blankinship developed an interest in international affairs and entered the University of California at Berkeley shortly thereafter. In 1937, after earning his M. A., Blankinship moved to New York to enter the doctoral program at Columbia University.

Having had a high regard for the Foreign Service, Blankinship joined the State Department in 1942 (without obtaining his Ph. D.), serving in Tijuana, Mexico, and then from April 1944 to April 1947, in Madrid. From Spain, he was sent to Honduras in the fall of 1947, where he served until 1952. In the summer of that year, Blankinship attended the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, for one year and after returning to the State Department in 1953, was assigned to South American affairs responsible

28) Deming Interview, FAOHP.

29) Author's interview with Byron E. Blankinship, July 2, 2000, Portland, Oregon (hereafter Blankinship interview).

for Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. In 1956, he moved to the office of the Foreign Service Inspection Corps where he continued until his assignment to Okinawa in the summer of 1959 as Consul General.

The Consuls General and the Okinawa Problem

The issues making up the "Okinawa problem" were numerous, often overlapped, and indeed were often intertwined. Namely these were the reversion issue, the military land issue, the crisis in local democracy and self-rule, and finally the issue of the bases themselves and base-related accidents, incidents, and crimes. While it is impossible here to discuss all of the aspects and all of the responses taken by the Consuls General, a brief look at their recommendations will prove instructive.

Early on, Murfin dealt mostly with the issues of reversion to Japan and democracy in local politics. In one of Murfin's first reports, he noted that in the March 2, 1952 election for the Ryukyu Legislature, the majority of the members elected had included in their platforms advocacy of early return to full Japanese sovereignty, thus suggesting that it was an issue to be taken seriously.³⁰⁾ Importantly, Murfin also noted that the election of pro-Communist Senaga Kamejiro to the assembly, while expected, over both a prominent banker, who was President of the Chamber of Commerce, Goeku Choshu, and a former governor, Taira Tatsuo, by large margins was "unexpected" and "considered indicative sentiment discontented elements."³¹⁾

In these early years, as mentioned above, the military land problem was also emerging as an area of serious friction, and Murfin warned of "Okinawans Resenting Military Encroachments" in a memorandum prepared on April 28, 1952.³²⁾ In particular, the residents were protesting the fact that they were being asked to move to make room for the second half of an 18-hole golf course. Interestingly, the area that Murfin reported on, Higa-Shimabuku in the north, was the same area that he had worked in during the Naval Military Government, showing that he continued to maintain contact with the residents there.

30) "Memorandum on Elections for Legislature of Ryukyuan Central Government (March 20, 1952)," Central Decimal File, 1950-1954 (794c.00/3-2052), Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland.

31) "Telegram No. 2 (March 5, 1952)," Central Decimal File, 1950-1954 (794c.00/3-552), RG 59.

32) "Despatch No. 95, Recent Internal Political Developments in Okinawa (May 21, 1952)," Central Decimal File, 1950-1954 (794c.00/5-2152), RG 59.

Murfin's job did not get any easier. In April 1953, in the aftermath of the "Tengan Incident" in which USCAR officials disqualified a reformist candidate on questionable charges after his victory, Murfin wrote:

It is apparent that, whatever the outcome, the prestige of the United States administration will be impaired by the affair. The natural reaction of the Ryukyuans is that United States Civil Administration for the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR) should not have waited until the election was over and its favored candidate was defeated, but should have disqualified Tengan [Choko] when he was nominated, if at all. Interference after the election, whether or not warranted, adds strength to the opposition parties' charges of "colonialism" and lack of autonomy of Government of the Ryukyu Islands (GRI), and, perhaps equally serious, the investigation and airing of the circumstances of Tengan's 1946 conviction served to remind the people of the long period in which they have been subject to the haphazard dispensation of justice itself by the provost courts. The record of conviction itself contains undated and unsigned ink changes—in one place showing the deletion of the word "not" before the word "guilty", and in another discrepancies in dates, which the opposition parties have seized and proclaimed as evidence that the record itself is questionable.³³⁾

Embassy First Secretary Steeves, who received Murfin's dispatch, forwarded his comments to the State Department, saying that the action "appears to have electrified the already highly charged political atmosphere of Okinawa," a reference to, among other things, the forced seizure of land in Aja and Mekaru villages on April 11 for base construction and expansion.³⁴⁾

The issue of the military interfering in the local political scene would continue to bother Murfin. In a letter to the Embassy in May 1954, Murfin in his "Swan Song," expressed his concern over the military's proposal to remove from office "communist" legislators—"I fail to see how much would be gained...and I feel that much more would be lost."³⁵⁾ Criticizing the military mentality which feels "that everyone who is not wholeheartedly for us is per se against us," he continued by explaining that "At present we have at least the form of a democratic institution in the Legislature,

33) "Despatch No. 11, Ryukyus Legislative By-Elections Test Party Strength (April 13, 1953)," Central Decimal File, 1950-1954 (794c.00/4-1353), RG 59.

34) "Despatch No. 2149, Okinawa By-Election Repercussions (April 16, 1953)," Central Decimal File, 1950-1954 (794c.00/4-1653), RG 59. In the follow-up elections, the opposition won.

35) "Letter from Murfin to Sam Berger (May 26, 1954), Enclosure to Letter from Murfin to Richard B. Finn (May 26, 1954)," Central Decimal File, 1950-1954 (794c.00/5-2654), RG 59.

with non-democratic and very definite final controls which probably are not generally noted elsewhere. If we impair the democratic form itself, by deciding the any representatives elected by the people may not participate, we have little left." For the "the military actually to actually remove elected representatives from office is going too far," Murfin warned, "if we are to pretend the semblance of a freely elected Legislature."

While a full purge of the Legislature itself did not take place after Murfin left in June for Tokyo (and then the United States), Chairman of the Okinawa People's Party (*Okinawa Jinminto*) Senaga was arrested in the fall for harboring a fugitive and was thus removed from the Legislature. The crisis in democracy would continue. Steeves, who arrived in early 1955 as Murfin's successor, would have his hands full.

In the spring of 1955, as Steeves was getting settled in, the military began its next stage of forced land acquisitions on Ie Jima. Steeves warned the State Department that "current plans for the acquisition of an additional 40,000 acres of land (roughly doubling current United States holdings) will result in further deterioration of Ryukyu-United States relations" and that "a new plan calling for the establishment of a naval air facility will result in the displacement of 1,000 families from land previously turned back to private owners."³⁶⁾

With the situation worsening due to the land problem and the overall dissatisfaction of the local residents, Steeves called for a "revolutionary" overhaul, arguing that "nothing short of a reorganization of the governmental institutions in these islands can provide the solution to the problems which the United States faces in carrying out its future responsibilities here. The deficiencies in the present system...cannot be rectified by half measures or minor alterations."³⁷⁾ Indeed, Steeves' basic premise was that "Military government cannot be a substitute for civil government over an extended period in times of peace." His recommendation received the strong support of Ambassador John M. Allison in Tokyo.³⁸⁾ Allison arranged for Steeves to meet with Assistant

36) "Despatch No. 18, Conversation with Shinzato and Ohama (September 8, 1955)," Central Decimal File, 1955-1959 (794.00/9-855), RG 59.

37) "Despatch No. 18, Draft Proposal for New Government of the Ryukyu Islands (October 23, 1956)," Folder 322.3 Ryukyus, September-December 1956, Box 47, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. For extensive recent coverage of this memo, see Yara Tomohiro, "Kaiheita no Okinawa iju Keikakuchushi o beisoryoji ga hatarakikake (U. S. Consul General Tries to Stop Plans for Marines to Relocate to Okinawa)," *Okinawa Taimusu*, April 28, 2002.

38) "Letter from Allison to Walter Robertson (October 25, 1956)," Folder 322.3 Ryukyus, September-December 1956, Box 47, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State.

Secretary of State, Walter S. Robertson, when the latter was in Tokyo in December that year.

State Department dissatisfaction with the way the administration was run had been brewing for several years. By 1956 however the momentum was moving toward changes in the administration. Eventually, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10713 in 1957, although the amendments were far from perfect.

It was not only the State Department that was dissatisfied with the running of the administration, but the Okinawans too. As was discussed above, voters in Naha elected Senaga mayor of Naha City to fill the vacancy when Toma Jugo became Chief Executive following Governor Higa Shuhei's sudden death. The inherent problems of U. S. policy and the limits of democracy under military government had shown itself again. Aware of this, Steeves, upon his return to Washington, drafted a long report on the situation in Okinawa. "We had a wonderful opportunity in Okinawa...but we muffed it," Steeves recalled when speaking of the report.³⁹⁾ "We could have made that island an example," he said to the author, "that still would ricocheting around Asia now. But we didn't do it." In Steeves' report, he warned that "the administration of Ryukyuan civil affairs, if unwisely executed, could in the long run negate the very purposes of our military mission" and that "our military interests could be endangered or placed in jeopardy by growing discontent on the part of the populace."⁴⁰⁾ Steeves' recommendations would be well received by the department and his views consistently consulted when he moved on to the POLAD office at CINCPAC that summer.

It was in this very sensitive environment that Deming arrived. Deming was very much aware that Okinawa had become a "cause-celebre" between Washington and Tokyo.⁴¹⁾ In an effort to improve relations following the disenfranchisement of Senaga and the subsequent election of leftist Kaneshi Saichi in early 1958, Deming held a party for Kaneshi at the Consulate. Many in the military were leery of meeting with the mayor, Deming recalled (half-laughingly), warning that it was better "not to fraternize with the enemy." In the author's interview with him Deming explained that

the war was still a hot memory [for the military]. So many of those in

39) Steeves interview.

40) "A Review of Our Ryukyuan Policy With Recommendations (March 14, 1957)," Folder: OCB 091. Japan (File #7) [February-May 1957], Box 49, OCB Central File Series, White House Office, National Security Council Staff Papers, 1948-1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

41) Deming interview.

Okinawa had had physical involvement in the battle of Okinawa, had lost friends or family. It was still a hot issue. They didn't like to make contact with the Okinawans even...Practically no Okinawans came [to where the officers lived] nor were they wanted. Some of the more junior officers had a more mellow, a more sophisticated attitude toward them. Some said, look we're here for security reasons. Let's work together. Let's relax these restrictions, etc. But it took a long time [for these views to prevail].

Ambassador Douglas MacArthur II, when he visited Okinawa in May 1957 shortly after his arrival in Japan, observed this atmosphere and was extremely critical of the military's attitude.⁴²⁾ He made a point of traveling only in the consular vehicle, Deming recalled, saying that he did not want to go around Okinawa in the military's planes or cars because "we ha[d] to keep a separation (between the military and the State Department)." MacArthur warned that "it was very easy to be 'captive' of the military, psychologically. You have to keep your independence."⁴³⁾

By this point, relations with Japan were indeed becoming endangered by the continued administration of Okinawa and in 1958 the White House and State Department seriously began considering returning Okinawa. Indeed, it may have been Deming's letter to the State Department of January 15, 1958 recommending that the U.S. "military position be preserved through the procedure of obtaining long term base rights," a plan considered by the State Department earlier in the decade, that became the impetus for a major reevaluation of the U. S. position there including reversion.⁴⁴⁾

In the meantime while this review was going on, Deming, and his right-hand man, Ronald A. Gaiduk, sought to maintain good relations with the military and worked tire-

42) MacArthur wrote Secretary of State Dulles that "Our overall relations with Japan would be so adversely affected by the Okinawa situation that they will steadily deteriorate to the point where they jeopardize our vital interests in this part, the relations not only with Japan but with other friendly Asian countries." See "Letter from MacArthur to Secretary of State (February 1, 1958)," Folder: Strictly Confidential-M(1), Box 3, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, John Foster Dulles Papers, 1952-1959, Eisenhower Library.

43) Deming interview. When reminded of MacArthur's letter to Dulles, Deming, obviously satisfied, said to the author, "Good for him...His going to Okinawa in that visit probably strengthened his feeling about the insensitivity (of the military) and the political difficulty of having and keeping good relations with a country when you are occupying a piece of that country militarily."

44) "Memorandum from Deming to Director of Office of Northeast Asian Affairs Parsons (January 15, 1958)," Folder 322.3 Ryukyus, January-February 1958, Box 48, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. For more on this plan, see the author's 9-part series "40 Nenmae no Kichi Togo Keikaku ni Manabu (Learning From the Base Consolidation Plan of 40 Years Ago)," *Ryukyu Shimpo*, January 19-February 1, 2001.

45) Interview with Mrs. Ronald A. Gaiduk, January 12, 2000, Washington, D. C.

46) Deming interview, FAOHP.

lessly at changing its attitudes.⁴⁵⁾ Nevertheless, Deming admitted that while he did not find “the ‘military mind’ inscrutable, [it was] difficult to accommodate.”⁴⁶⁾

Blankinship too sought necessarily to maintain good relations with the military and this was institutionalized by the creation of POLAD in 1960. At the same time, one month prior to its establishment, Blankinship recommended that it was “essential to present the new POLAD position to the public in a way that will not derogate posture of the State Department as compared to the military. Unless this is accomplished, Ryukyuan and other observers may interpret creation of POLAD as tightening of military authority and depreciation of American civilian role in Okinawa.”⁴⁷⁾ Alluding to the problem of the test firing of Nike-Hercules missiles in November (1959), Blankinship added that “coming on the heels of recent agitation here, in Japan, and Red China regarding Nike firings, any action that could be interpreted as reduction in status of Consular Unit may be seen here as ominous indication of further military domination.” Ironically, it seems, Blankinship’s foreboding would prove correct—despite the fact that the number of State Department personnel slightly increased with the existence of both the POLAD office and the continuation of the Consulate, reporting on the local situation and influence there decreased in the first half of the 1960s because of the HiCom’s efforts to maintain the *status quo* with regard to the administration of the islands and his lack of consultation with either POLAD or the Consul General (who subsequently became Consul).

Conclusions

With the State Department institutionally excluded from occupation/administration policy for Okinawa, and the Consul General in a unique, trying, and disadvantaged position, unable to decide or directly influence policy, it may be difficult to accurately evaluate his role there. Nevertheless, as the above study suggests, the State Department’s representative in Naha was a moderating influence on policy considerations, with his recommendations being read and acted on (in many, but of course, not all situations) by those in policy-making circles in the State Department who sought to confront and challenge the Defense Department regarding not only the

47) “Telegram No. 159 from Naha to Secretary of State (December 3, 1959),” Central Decimal File, 1955-1959 (794c.0221/12-359), RG 59

administration, but the rationale behind the administration itself.

It would not be until 1972 before Okinawa was returned to Japan. The United States was lucky that the poorly run administration of Okinawa did not further blow up into an irreparable bilateral issue with Japan, embittering both the people of Okinawa and the rest of Japan in the process, and embarrassing U. S. prestige abroad. The presence of the Consul General, who was able to independently observe the situation there and report to his superiors in Tokyo and Washington through independent communication channels, was vital in this regard, acting to point out early on problem areas and to recommend improvements, as well as to work with his Japanese counterparts (a subject not taken up here). Likewise, while carefully maintaining good relations with the military, as well as with the local population, the Consul General was able to act as a moderating influence both toward the military and the often-agitated residents and their representatives.

Having a high quality staff, both local and American, aided the work of the Consul General tremendously, who in some cases had little experience with politico-military or Okinawan-related affairs prior to their assignment. Moreover, the interest in the situation in Okinawa demonstrated by both the Tokyo Embassy and the State Department in Washington, as symbolized by the frequent exchange of letters (in addition to telegrams) and visits (Ambassador Murphy in 1952, Ambassador MacArthur in May 1957 and March 1959, Undersecretary Christian A. Herter in August 1957, as well as numerous others) was an important factor in the quality of the work of the Consuls General. Unfortunately, rather than tapping into the knowledge gained by the Consuls General during his time in Okinawa, the State Department assigned each Consul General (with the exception of Steeves) to areas and other divisions for the most part unrelated to Okinawa.

Nevertheless, while their work was no doubt difficult, all of the Consuls General remember fondly the people of Okinawa (and the liking is mutual) — perhaps the best testimony of the bridge that the Consulate served during this trying time.