

2007 Miyako Jima trip
By Fredio Samples

**I left the Seattle Airport a little after noon on the 13th of May. It was Sunday
“Mothers Day”.**

**It had been three years since I had made that trip back to the island in the spring of
2004. My thoughts as I boarded the plane, was to sit back, relax and enjoy every
minute of this trip. I was fooling myself for the moment, for I knew by experience on
these long trips that things like clearing through airports, finding and retrieving
luggage, and finding the correct airport departing gates would wear my patience
down sooner or later.**

**I had a zillion things on my agenda and thirteen days to try and get them all done
once I arrived. My first trip back three years ago was a learning experience. I had
mastered the ins and outs of all the changes that had occurred since my Air Force
days there back in 1964. Now was a good time to put this experience to a good use.**

**Remembering on my previous trip that the English language had all but
disappeared on the island after the Radar station at Nobaru had been turned over
to the Japanese Air Defense Forces and the departing of the Americans who had up
until then operated the radar station, I had invited a good Japanese friend of mine
from Tokyo to join me at Miyako and he gladly accepted. This was truly a blessing.**

**Not only was he going to translate the language, he was also going to be my
chauffeur.**

**The Air routing of this trip from the US would be different than it was in 2004. A
service opened between Tokyo’s Narita’s International Airport and Naha Okinawa
early in 2007. Previous to this, Air service within the Tokyo region was available to
Okinawa only by departing from the Tokyo Domestic airport. This Airport is a long
distance from the international arrivals into Tokyo. Often this would mean an
overnight stay before catching the flight out the next day.**

**This new routing was not without its problems. Finding the proper departing gate in
this large Airport after clearing through their immigration and customs became
rather testy.**

**There was a gate number showing on my ticket, but when I arrived at this gate the
sign showing the next departing airplane and its destination was not Okinawa.**

**When I inquired, I was told to sit down and wait for instructions. Wasn’t long
before several Americans were arriving at this gate and I could see that they too
were confused.**

**Finally, a man came through the door from the outside and asked that all
passengers going to Okinawa , come outside and board a bus. We were driven away
from the terminal for some distance along the side of the runway before stopping
beside a lonely Boeing 767 sitting off to one side of the runway. We left the Bus here
and walked over to the plane and climbed up a make shift set of steps to the**

airplane. We experienced much same procedure departing from the plane when we arrived at Okinawa.

It was about a three hour flight down to Okinawa from Tokyo. I grabbed a Taxi at the Okinawa Airport and headed to Naha City. My destination was the Sun Palace Hotel., Located a couple blocks from Kokusai dori. On our way there we passed by the old Army depot near Naha port. It really looked bare. What I had remembered so well when I would catch the LSM going down to Miyako here, was the large supply of Army Vehicles and other supplies that once crowded this large complex. Now, a tall metal fence surrounds this bare empty complex. There was no sign of life.

My plans were to stay here at Naha for two full days before going south to Miyako.

From my hotel window I could see Kokusai street. I believe this is the busiest shopping street in Okinawa. If not, then one of the busiest. It might have been the day of the week, Sure seemed to be twice the amount of people out on this street as there was three years ago. Just outside of my hotel is the Mono rail service. The Mono rail service here is a very convenient and low cost way of getting to and from places in Naha City and outwards North to Shuri and south to the old Naha Air base, now called Naha Airport. This Mono rail transportation system is built much like a train system. It has a few individual passenger cars that are hooked together that ride on a rail high above the streets. To support the rail and cars are large bulky vertical stanchions that rise up from the street level that are placed every so many feet apart. As you walk around the city you may walk below this rail system while the cars rumble along above you as this rail system weaves in and out and over the city.

The streets in Naha are like any typical Asian city these days. Packed with cars, buses, motor bikes and taxis. One day from my Hotel window I counted the vehicles passing by on the street below. On the average, every 4th vehicle was a taxi. Horns and sirens can be heard constantly anywhere you go.

Since the Naha Air Base was turned back to the Japanese Air and Naval forces, Other than those American service men and women arriving at the Naha Air terminal you don't see any Americans around Naha. The American service people are met by Military buses and taken from the Airport to their destination. In most

cases this is North of Naha city.



On my first full day at Naha I planned to roam around on foot. It was a nice day around 80 degrees although very humid. It wasn't long before my shirt was sticking to my skin. I had forgotten just how humid it can get at Okinawa. I was never permanently stationed at Naha Air Base. I had a couple RR's here and I had had a week at Naha AB living in the transit Quonset huts before being shipped down to Miyako. During that week I had made a few trips into Naha City and a few trips to Naminioe. Today, I was going to try out my sense of directions and see if I could walk to Naminioe. In 2004, David Law and I walked through the streets of Naminioe and took some pictures. At that time I had found a place that I had remembered on my first visit back in 1964 and was now wondering if it was still there today. It took me about 20 minutes to walk over to Naminioe. A good clue along the way was signs pointing the directions to the Naminioe Shrine. I knew this Shrine was three blocks away from my place of interest. The narrow streets and buildings looked much the same as they did 43 years ago. On the fronts of the buildings you could see the rusted hardware that once held those colorful signs that read "Ohio Club," "New York Club" etc. Those signs are now long gone into history and so is the Naminioe that we once knew. The streets are now deserted and absent of all the music, bright lights and young American GI's.

As I rounded a corner I suddenly froze, for there before me on the corner was and old gray two story concrete building.. On one side was stairs that ran along the outside of the building and up to 2nd floor. At the top of the stairs was a large window that faced the street below. A small sign hung from the doorway.

Printed in English was the word “RESTAURANT” and below this word in smaller letters was the words: “State Side” This was it. My mind flashed back to 43 years ago when I climbed those same stairs and made myself comfortable sitting, looking out onto the street while drinking my first beer in Naminoue while a young bar girl wearing a short dress begged for change for the juke box and a Coke-A- High (Coke and ice in a cocktail glass). I took some pictures and walked back to Naha City and Kokusai dori where I walked up and down while taking in all the many colorful things that the merchants were selling in their small shops. There are several American named fast food restaurants along this street. KFC, Wendy’s, McDonalds and even a Starbucks coffee shop. It was lunch time, so I settled for McDonalds. It wasn’t the food that drew me there, it was the Air conditioned building, However, the chicken sandwich I ordered wasn’t bad at all. It sure beat airport food.

On my last day while on the island of Okinawa before traveling on to Miyako Jima, I made a Bus trip to the southern tip of Okinawa island to a place called Mabuni .

Here, I toured the magnificent Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum located at Mabuni hill or called hill 89 by the US Forces back in 1945. Here with their backs to the sea, it’s written that the Japanese made their last stand against the Americans to protect the island of Okinawa. Here in the wee morning hours on the 22nd of May 1945, General Ushijima and his Chief of staff, General Cho committed Hara-Kara.

Thousands of Okinawa civilians committed suicide, fearing that they would be slaughtered by the Americans if captured. All out efforts were made to persuade them to surrender. The Japanese had convinced them that they would die at the hands of the Americans. Outside on the lawns surrounding the museum are many walls , having the names of those who died there inscribed, including Americans.



Flying down from Okinawa to Miyako Jima, our JAL 737 pilot approached Miyako on a SW heading and crossed over to the island's west side near the center of the island. This brought us right over the south end of the Nobaru ridge where I could see the old 623rd Radar site as we passed just to the south of it. Then once we were across the island on the west side near the island of Kurima, we rolled to the right in a sharp bank and turned back to a NE heading and then dropped in over Junk Bay and landed at the old Hirara Airfield. Now this airfield is called the Miyako Jima Airport. Junk Bay was the official US Military name given to Yonaha Bay during the battle for Okinawa in 1945.

This approach to Miyako would have made for some fine aerial photo pictures had I been able to have used my camera. I had a window seat and the weather was clear and sunny. A Golden opportunity had just passed. I attempted to take aerial pictures three years before when we were approaching the island and was told very politely to put my camera away by the Japanese Stewardess and she explained that it was not allowed during the landing approach by the Japanese Air regulatory agency.

It was 80 degrees and humid when I got off the plane at the modern Miyako Airport. This airport supports nine passenger jet flights, in and out, each day. One flight is a non stop flight to Osaka, Japan, and the others are to Okinawa, and the islands of Ishigaki Jima and Iromote.

Taxi service is excellent at the airport. They line up just outside the Airport exit doors at the curb. The drivers will help load your bags into the cab and will whisk

you off to your destination. In my case it was to be the Miyako Daiichi Hotel, a convenient nine story hotel in Hirara city. This hotel is located two blocks inland from the old Hirara ship dock where LSM 335 would dock when bringing supplies to the radar station. It has western style rooms, western style restaurant and is classified as a Japanese business hotel. The daily rate for one person is \$65.00 American dollars, that is after the conversion of Japanese Yen. Japanese Yen is now the standard currency for Miyako and all of the Ryukyu Islands. A small American flag is pasted to the front entry door of the hotel and a picture of James Dean hangs inside the restaurant. Three years ago I brought along some small Boeing Aircraft logos and some of these are now displayed on the lobby walls. I'm now wondering if they are going to hang on their walls a picture I give them this trip of the Japanese baseball player: ICHIRO, who is one of the better batters and fielders for the Seattle Mariners baseball team. ICHIRO, spent a short time training at Miyako before his baseball career really took off. He is highly thought of on the island and here in Seattle. The one thing that would have really been handy at this hotel would have been an English speaking employee.

My Japanese friend Mr. Sonoda was waiting in the lobby when I arrived. He prefers to be called Ted, a nick name given to him by American occupation forces in 1946. He had traveled down to Miyako from his home near Tokyo a day before I arrived.

Ted and I have known each other since the early seventies. We had previously worked together in Japan on some airplane projects. Ted Sonoda was the Quality Control manager for a Japanese airplane parts manufacturing company who held a contract with the Boeing company, making airplane parts for the Airliners built in Seattle. I was a Senior Inspector for Boeing and I was sent to Japan to pass judgment on the finished parts. So, Ted and I over the years became best friends. Ted had come to Miyako to help me translate the language and to be my Chauffeur.

Finding a road map of Miyako in English was impossible. There were many of these maps in German and Japanese and that is what I had to settle with. Why were so many maps printed in German? It's because of the German tourist who now visit here. Their interest in this island has to do with the German Culture Center that has been built here. This came about by a German ship accident that happened in 1873.

A German merchant sailing ship by the name of "Robertson" was sailing near Miyako and was caught in a violent typhoon and was forced onto the rocky shore of Miyako island, where the ship broke apart. The ship's crew was rescued by some alert brave Miyako men who went into the rough sea and helped the Germans to the safety of the island. In down town Hirara City a monument stands in honor of those courageous men who risked their lives for others. The German government paid gratitude to the island and its people by sending many gifts from Germany. A few years ago a German delegation visited Miyako and became interested in building a Castle on the Island near the shore where the German merchant ship had wrecked during the typhoon. Today there is a place near Ueno called the German Culture village. This is located on the south end of the island. A Castle has been built that now houses all of the gifts sent from Germany to the Miyako Island. There is a Golf course, a nice large restaurant and Hotel. A one night stay at this hotel for one

person will run you \$150.00 for the cheapest room. But, if you are on vacation, one night here is well worth the price of the room. The food and accommodations are 1st Class. This is Honeymooners paradise. A one way taxi fare from downtown Hirara to the German Culture village is \$12.00.

Eating on the Island was no problem. In fact I found it interesting. The styles and types varied depending on the restaurant just like it does here in the US. A complimentary buffet style breakfast was served at my hotel each morning between 730 and 1000 MT. Yes, the Island uses the 24 hour military clock. Laid out each morning on the counter in the hotel restaurant was rice, tea, coffee, juice, eggs, sweet potato patties, fish, bread, butter, sea weed salad and some days there were fried potatoes. The styles of eggs were fixed different each day. One day the eggs were laid out raw and in the shell. I watched as others around me would break a raw egg into a bowl of Soy Sauce, mix it and pour this mixture over top of a bowl of white rice. "No thank you", was my answer when offered this dish. However, I ate and enjoyed most of the food that was offered. Lunches consisted mostly of snacks that I had brought along with me on the trip. We ate these while driving around on the Island. For a late dinner, I would go out to the local restaurants in Hirara City, Those that were in walking distance. A variety of Japanese food was available at these restaurants. Prices of dinners varied between \$8.00 and \$15.00. Each dinner offered was displayed in a see through window case as you entered the restaurant along with its price. So, you can pick out your dinner and know its price by the time you reached your eating spot. That spot could be sitting on the floor, or Western style, sitting at a table. Most restaurants have both to offer.

Just after I arrived at the hotel and met Ted, I asked the Hotel clerk to call Joe, the barber who cut hair at the radar station while the Americans ran the site and to inform him that I had arrived. Joe came pulling in to the hotel parking lot 15 or so minutes later. He began scolding me like I had missed a hair cut appointment. You said in your letter that you were going to be here this morning, pointing to his watch, it's now past 1300. "Oh, well get in my car". I want to take you somewhere. Ted said that he would do some sight seeing on his own and would meet me later. So Joe and I started down the hill toward the ship dock and then turned to the right heading NE. following the shore line. I asked Joe if this was the way to Sunayama beach (Colonel's beach) but, he never answered me. I noticed he was now wearing a hearing aid. Off to my left we passed a large building located on the shore line. It had two distinctly tall smoke stacks along the side of the building and these stacks were releasing a dark smoke. This time I shouted out to Joe, "What is this", pointing to the building, "Juice plant" was his answer. "You mean like an electrical power plant". "Yes" was his answer. I had forgotten to mention that Joe has remembered a few words taught him by the American airmen. After a while we came to an intersection and Joe turned to the left and drove a short distance where the road came to a dead end. There before us was a white sandy path leading down toward the shore. We exited the car and walked down this path and near the bottom we came clear of some tall bushes and off to my left was the natural stone arch of Sunayama beach that must be in every Airman's picture Album who was ever

stationed on the island of Miyako Jima. This was the first time that I had laid eyes on this arch other than pictures since 1964. According to Joe, throughout the years many squadron and crew parties were held here. Nothing about the beach or the arch has changed over the years. Time has stood still for this place. After taking some pictures we went back to the car and I told Joe that I had heard that there had been a bridge built that now connected Miyako with the small island of Ikema at the very northern tip of Miyako Island and I didn't think that we were very far from there. I ask Joe if it would be possible to drive over this bridge to Ikema and visit the Light house that was there. I had never been on the island of Ikema. However, I had become aware of some stories told by WWII veterans that flew bombing and strafing missions at Miyako who claimed they used this light house on Ikema Island for target practice. One of these fellows I had recently talked to by phone just before leaving on this trip was a rear turret gunner on a US Navy TBM Grumman in 1945. His comments were: "We riddled that light house at the north end of Miyako jima with our 50 calibers and we put their light out". I thought to myself, wouldn't he be excited if I brought him a picture of the light house that he shot at 62 years ago. Well, I even did better than that, but I will tell about this later time. Joe thought that my idea of visiting Ikema and the light house was a good idea so he drove on North toward the bridge. While crossing the bridge I was a bit disappointed that I couldn't see the water below from the car seat. The bridge side rails blocked most of the view. I did catch a glimpse and noticed that the water was rather shallow between the islands. Ikema Island is noted for its fishing villages and the light house. Not much more goes on here. Some small family gardens do exist. We drove right up to the light house that I expect to be riddled with bullet holes. Not one hole did I see. Must have been that after the war was over that a new outer covering had been installed along the sides. I stood there looking up into the sky imagining that I could see planes over head and hear the zinging of the bullets as they hit and ricocheted off the towering light house. As we started back toward the bridge, Joe indicated by rubbing his stomach that he was hungry. Joe pulled over to the side of the road where a lady was grubbing in her garden and ask her for some directions. She pointed and Joe drove in that direction. We reached a fishing village and there next to the dock was a restaurant. We went in and sat down. We were brought some local tea but we asked for coffee and it was brought out to us later. I noticed that fishermen were bringing in some fresh fish from their boats and the ladies were preparing them in the kitchen. Not wanting to be different, I ordered fish of the day. "How do you want it prepared?" I was asked. I have always liked fried fish so, I asked for it to be fried. Joe ordered the same. After a couple bits, I asked Joe to ask them what type of fish I was eating. He got up and waked over to the kitchen and inquired. Then the lady brought out a fish, holding it by the tail. "Looks like a Tuna". "Yes, Tuna", Joe said. This was the first fresh fried Tuna that I had ever eaten. I'm still raving about how good that fried Tuna tasted. In the future I will be looking for Tuna and have it breaded and fried. Before we left, Joe walked down to some boats near the dock and came back with two large Tunas that he had purchased from a fisherman. I took this as proof that he too enjoyed the meal. It was now time to return to Miyako Jima. We passed back over the bridge to Miyako. This bridge, which opened for traffic in 1992 is 4,675 feet long. It is said that this is one of

the longest bridges constructed over water in Japan at this date. However, a much longer bridge is under construction at Miyako and when finished it will connect Miyako with Irabu and Shimoji Jima.

I was touched with the following words I found posted at the entry of the museum and I have copied them.

**Whenever we reflect upon the realities of the Battle of
Okinawa.**

We think nothing is more degrading than War.

In the face these horrifying experiences, no one could approve of, much less glorify, war. To be sure, it is known beings that would start a war, But what is more important is, Is it not we, human beings, who could endeavor to prevent it?

**Since the battle ended, we have detested all kinds of war,
Determined to build an island of peace.**

**This is our unwavering principle that we have come to
Cherish,
in return for a price too high to pay.**