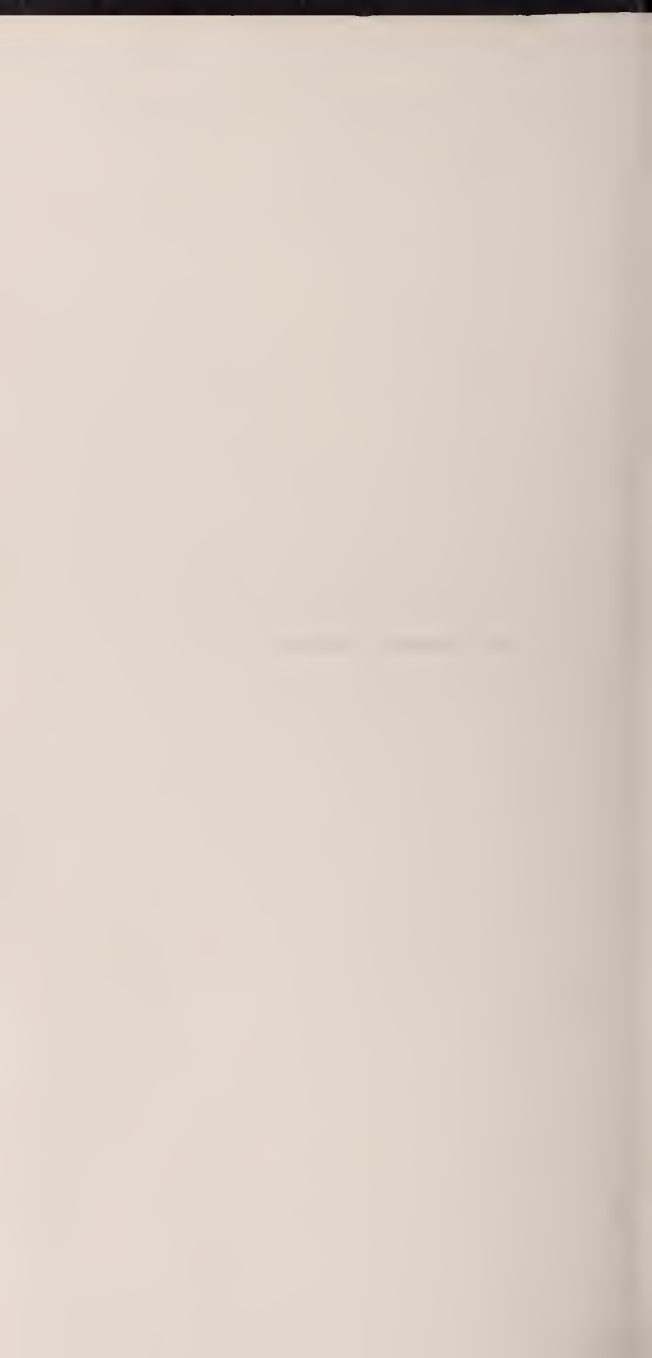




THE CHURCH ON

OKINAWA

AND THE RYUKYU ISLANDS



The Church on Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands

Until recently few Americans had ever heard of Okinawa. But millions of them know about the place today.

It sprang to fame on Easter Sunday in 1945, when the American forces landed in "Operation Iceberg." Eighty-two days of the fiercest fighting in World War II followed before the island was finally won.

The Americans found a little island about sixty miles long and from two to eighteen miles wide, lying in the Pacific Ocean, off the China coast, midway between Formosa and Japan, 350 miles south of the Japanese home islands. It had an area of around five hundred square miles, with half a million people, more or less, living in numerous villages and towns.

Okinawa is the central and most important island of the small archipelago long known as the Loo Choo Islands. Now usually referred to as the Ryukyus in view of their almost complete Japonization during recent decades, they have always possessed strategic cultural, commercial, and military importance because of their location and natural relationship to the nearby lands of the north, south, and west. Now they have become of great significance to the United States and the world at large.

The Land

The Okinawans live mainly by agriculture—sugar cane and rice, for the most part—supplemented by the making of panama hats, lacquer work, and pottery. The houses, before the war destroyed so many of them, were solidly built of stone or brick to withstand the frequent typhoons.

There are half a dozen cities and a large number of towns and villiages on the island. The capital is Naha, with a population of around forty thousand souls.

The island was terribly devastated in the war. One hundred and fifty thousand people were killed.

The ruined Methodist Church at Naha, capital of Okinawa



Naha was almost obliterated from the map, as were other centers of population. Homes, schools, churches, factories, farms, animals were wiped out.

People hastily constructed thatched-roof shacks and began efforts to bring their land back to productivity. The American churches sent relief supplies, with

Typical village home and family on Okinawa after the war



some goats and heifers, and the American military government promised the people a meager 1,800-calorie diet of cheap rations.

But little was done to assist the people in rebuilding their homes and reviving their shattered social life. The need of the people from the cultural angle is very great.

The People

Okinawa is an ancient land and its inhabitants are an ancient people. Seventy years ago the island was annexed by the Japanese empire; for centuries before that time it had paid tribute to China. No one knows exactly who the Okinawans are, or how or when they first came to their present home. They seem to be closely related to the natives of Inner Mongolia, but they are now more akin to the Japanese, since they have inherited so much of the Japanese culture and use the Japanese language.

Shintoism and Buddhism have been introduced on the island, and there are numerous Christians, but Okinawan religion remains primitive and strongly tinged with animism.

"The Okinawans worship their ancestors and live in a fearsome world in which all animals and all natural objects are inhabited by spirits—some good spirits, some evil. Until very recently the people in the rural areas to the north practiced the rite of human sacrifice."

Christian Influence

Unlike Japan and the Philippines, Okinawa was not greatly affected by Christianity or Western cul-

ture prior to this century. Before World War II the Roman Catholics had only one church on the island and but small influence elsewhere in the archipelago.

On the little island of Yagachi near at hand there is a leper colony, formerly staffed with doctors and nurses from Japan, some of whom were Christians. The colony is now supported by the American military government.

There were also a few Protestant groups, and some former members of the united Church of Christ of Japan; and many of the latter have returned to Okinawa from Japan since the close of the war.

Protestant influence is small, but the church has gained a foothold and is poised for a greater advance. This is to be made as an interdenominational project under the general sponsorship of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, implemented by the missionaries of various denominations.

The task is very great. The need is very great. Homes and institutions must be reestablished. Schools and training centers must be provided. Chapels must be built. The whole evangelistic, teaching, healing, and serving ministry of the churches must be set in operation.

Methodist History

The Methodists were among the pioneers on Okinawa. Their activity has been carried on there for half a century. Dr. and Mrs. H. B. Schwartz and the Rev. and Mrs. Earl Bull established Methodist churches on Okinawa, and even today elderly Chris-

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26° 30'

EAST CHINA SEA



Sesoko

Kin

Ishikawa

Hianza

Kerama Retto

Shuri

Yonabaru

Naha

Kuta

Itoman

★ SHOWING THE MAIN CENTERS OF WORK

Hedo ★

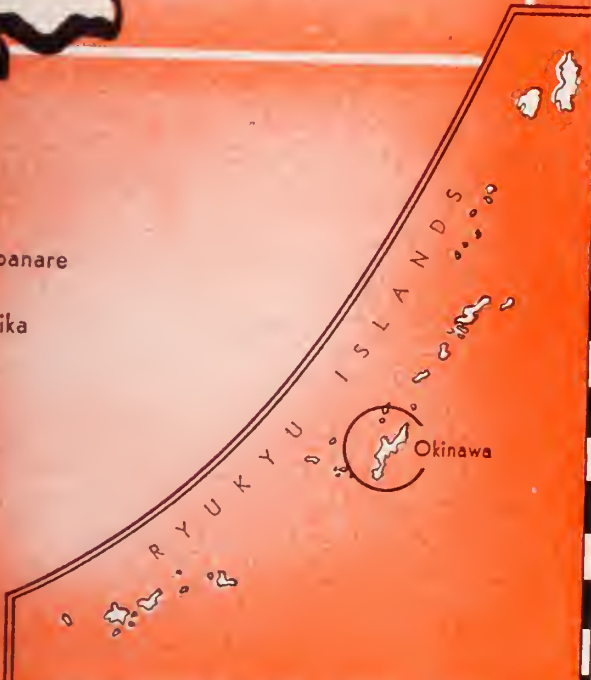
Yagachi

Nago

Ike
akabanare

nahika

en



26° 30'

tians tell the visitor that they were baptized by "Dakuta Schwarttsu" or "Bu-ru Sensei."

By the middle twenties, however, due to Japan's militaristic and imperialistic designs, it was becoming difficult for Americans to carry on missionary activities as Americans in the Ryukyus. Japanese Christians then assumed increasing responsibility for evangelism among its own migrant people and the Okinawans. From all these efforts there developed a small but vigorous Protestant constituency of Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Holiness communicants and churches.

All this was badly battered and scattered in the closing months of the Pacific war. Not one church was left undamaged by American bombs and fire. From the early landings on Okinawa came reports of a church spire and cross still uplifted in what had been the once flourishing twin-city community of Shuri and Naha. This was not a Roman Catholic landmark, as at first reported, but what was left of the finest Methodist church on the island.

Army and Navy chaplains and G.I. Christians soon found fellowship with the native church groups, and there came into existence what was at first called the Okinawan Christian Association and is now known as the Church of Christ on Okinawa. During the war the Okinawan churches had all been united with the Japanese Christian movement, which underwent a similar unification. The Okinawan Christians wanted to continue as a united church, and American army and navy personnel agreed. Soon after the war ended, therefore, appeals came to the United States

for missionaries to be sent out without any denominational labels.

The Methodists heard and heeded that call. They have sent to Okinawa the first missionaries to cooperate with the Church of Christ in the Ryukyu Islands. These are the Rev. and Mrs. Otis W. Bell. Finding no housing or other facilities available in Okinawa, they built their own house, as have many pioneers of other days in other lands.

Their support was provided by the Crescent Hill Methodist Church of Louisville, Kentucky. The new house, a station wagon, and other equipment have been furnished by the First Methodist Church of Glendale, California.

Working with the Bells is Rev. Yoshia Higa, a former Baptist whom the Methodists brought to the United States as a Crusade Scholar for study at Drew Theological Seminary.

This Okinawa project has appealed to Negro churches and mission societies in the United States. The National Baptist Convention is supporting Yoshio Higa and the Atlantic States Area of the Central Jurisdiction of The Methodist Church has accepted Advance Specials for the rebuilding and maintenance of churches.

Future Needs in Okinawa

This being a new field of missionary endeavor, special financial support must be found to maintain it. Methodists should therefore know the needs, for which they should be responsible in the total interdenominational program.



Rev. and Mrs. Otis Bell and family, Methodist missionaries on Okinawa



Meeting of pastors and Christian workers on Okinawa, with American chaplains



*Rev. Yoshio Higa (right) and Koshiri Shikiyi,
governor of Okinawa, in 1948*



A rural church group on Okinawa

The following are some of the needs for the immediate future:

Non-recurring Needs

Reconstruction and repair of churches.....	\$10,000
Missionary residence	10,000
Automobile for missionary, including shipping...	2,500

Recurring (Annual) Needs

Support of pastors and families.....	\$ 2,000
Production and distribution of literature.....	1,000
Religious education and youth programs.....	2,000
Leadership training institutes.....	1,000
Audio-visual aids and programs.....	1,000
Travel and incidental work.....	1,000

Since the Methodists established Protestant missions on Okinawa, most of the Christians there have a Methodist background. And since missionaries are again on the islands, the Methodists should regard the work as a challenge and an opportunity for great evangelistic service among a needy people on an interesting Pacific island.

Contributions for the work on Okinawa are solicited from churches, groups and individuals. Gifts will be acknowledged and efforts will be made to establish personal contact with the workers on the field. Contributions should be sent, clearly marked for Okinawa, through local church or conference treasurers or direct to:

Dr. A. E. Beebe, Treasurer
150 Fifth Avenue
New York 11, New York



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Division of Education and Cultivation
Board of Missions and Church Extension

THE METHODIST CHURCH

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