

The Bond between Okinawa and Hawaii

The ravages of the Pacific War brought disaster and catastrophic damage to the island of Okinawa. Under these harsh conditions, the people of the island were forced to eke out a living, even as they struggled to find food amidst the scorched landscape. News of the devastation in Okinawa was conveyed to Hawaii via returning soldiers and wartime translators from the U.S. military. The testimony of Taro Higa in particular, who had taken part in the Battle of Okinawa, stirred the hearts of the Hawaiian Uchinanchu (Okinawan) community.

“The island is devoid of people and the *furu* (pig pens) are empty.”

An indispensable source of food, Okinawa contained over 100,000 pigs in the prewar period. After the war, this number had plummeted to just 7,731 (according to the Ryukyu Government’s 1946 records), leaving Okinawa in a dire situation.

Seeing that their ancestral homeland was in tragic shape and in need of aid, the Uchinanchu of Hawaii worried for their home towns and wondered if there was any way that they could help the island’s recovery. As a result, a large number of relief foundations were established. One of these, the United Okinawan Assistance Association of Hawaii had the idea of sending live pigs to Okinawa to aid in the relief effort. Pigs were more than merely a source of food, as their waste could also be used to fertilize and enrich farmland, and the resulting crops would find their way back to each family’s dinner table.

The Association set about raising funds, believing that Okinawa would be all right as long as the pigs could be delivered. Thanks to the efforts of its members and the fervent wills of Hawaii’s Uchinanchu community, they succeeded in raising \$50,000 in donations. For comparison, the monthly salary of an Okinawan public official at the time was \$25.

This money was used to purchase 550 pigs. The ship that they contracted for the journey was called the *Owen*. The Hawaiian Uchinanchu men on board eventually came to be known as “the seven heroes.”

The *Owen* departed for Okinawa on August 31, 1948, and the voyage became a life and death struggle as the ship was assaulted by raging storms and battered by tall waves. The journey was further delayed by the need to take a roundabout route in order to avoid sea mines left over from the war. By the 3 week mark, the passenger’s water supply and the feed for the pigs was almost completely depleted.

In spite of these setbacks, the seven heroes, united in their love for their homeland, persevered towards Okinawa. After 28 grueling days at sea, the passengers

finally caught sight of the Okinawan islands on September 27.

The *Owen* made landfall on White Beach, in the *Katsuren Heshikiya* region of Uruma City. The 550 pigs which the Hawaiian Uchinanchu had risked their very lives to deliver were evenly distributed among the Okinawan public, and through breeding swelled to 100,000 in the span of 4 years. This revitalized the Okinawan pig farming industry and solved the island's food shortage, greatly contributing to its postwar recovery. Okinawa's tradition of consuming pork was successfully passed down, and pork continues to be a staple of the Okinawan diet to this day. This is all thanks to those 550 pigs that came from Hawaii.

This movement which began in Hawaii eventually spread to the American mainland and South America, and in time aid began to pour into Okinawa from all across the globe. We Okinawans must never forget that it was thanks to the support of so many people that we were able to survive.

The story of the pigs was turned into a musical by the city of Uruma, and it is also taught in textbooks and school festivals across Okinawa. In this way, we ensure that the story is passed down to the children of the next generation who hold the future of our islands in their hands.

In order to spread the knowledge of this incredible true story to as many people as possible, the "Pigs from the Sea" Commemorative Monument Construction Executive Committee collected funds from the prefectural government, various municipalities, and related individuals in the livestock industry for construction of this monument. We were able to make this project a reality thanks to the donations of the individuals, organizations, and companies who kindly supported our mission.

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"Pigs From the Sea" Commemorative Monument Construction Executive Committee