



The Japanese Imperial flag, signed by members of the Fifth Marine Regiment, captured at Shuri Castle during the Battle of Okinawa, May 29, 1945. The flag is part of an exhibit that has been located on Camp Kinser since 1994 and has more than 1,000 World War II artifacts on display. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Christopher Hummel/Released)



Equipment worn by American Marines during the Battle of Okinawa. This display is part of an exhibit located on Camp Kinser and highlights artifacts from the 82 day battle. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Christopher Hummel/Released)



A K-bar knife used by American service members during the Battle of Okinawa. Corrosion affected many items displayed at the Camp Kinser exhibit due to Okinawa's wet weather conditions (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Christopher Hummel/Released)



The Japanese Imperial Naval flag was known to U.S. service members as the "Kamikaze" flag - most people didn't know it wasn't the national flag. This flag is part of an exhibit that has been located on Camp Kinser since 1994 and has more than 1,000 World War II artifacts on display. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Christopher Hummel/Released)

Okinawa history lives on Camp Kinser

by Staff Sgt. Christopher Hummel
18th Wing Public Affairs

11/22/2011 - **KADENA AIR BASE, Japan** -- The Battle for Okinawa lasted nearly three months with more than 200,000 military and civilians killed in the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific theater of the Second World War.

Kadena Air Base was one of the primary objectives taken by American forces on April 1, 1945, during Operation Iceberg.



A Japanese kamikaze exhibit on display at Camp Kinser. Commonly translated to divine wind, kamikaze pilots became more prominent during the latter stages of the war in the Pacific. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Christopher Hummel/Released)

Near Kadena 18th Wing headquarters sits an old hut, just off the road near the tree line. Known as a Quonset hut, this style building was used as base housing, offices, medical facilities, and even the wing headquarters up until 1958.

In 1992, retired U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Dave Davenport created a museum in the old Quonset and dedicated the building to artifacts from the Battle of Okinawa.

The museum closed in 1994 and the items it displayed were moved to Camp Kinser, where Davenport reopened the exhibit a year later on the 50th anniversary of the battle.

Currently managed by Chris Majeski, the Battle of Okinawa exhibit on Kinser houses thousands of artifacts from the war.

"This wasn't a pretty war," said Majeski. "We want those who come through here to realize that war isn't like a video game - there is no respawning or reset button. These Japanese, Okinawans and Americans died very painful deaths; this exhibit tries to honor their sacrifices."

Some of the more prominent displays include heavy weapons, flags and manikins featuring uniforms and equipment of the time.

One item in particular is a one-of-a-kind Japanese flag, known as the Shuri Castle flag.

When the castle was taken by the Marines on May 29, 1945, an air strike was already inbound, called in earlier by the Army. Having no way to communicate with the pilots, the Marines decided to pull down the Japanese flag that flew over the castle and raise the American flag. Unfortunately, no one had the Stars and Stripes on them.

Company commander Lt. Don Sinn was wounded leading up to the assault and one of his Marines happened to pick up his helmet. The helmet contained a gift to Sinn, a Confederate flag given to him by the Daughters of the Confederacy.

When the rebel flag was pulled down three days later it was signed by members of the Fifth Marine Regiment.

The Shuri Castle flag, as well as thousands of other items recovered around Okinawa, all have stories to tell from a war that ended more than 66 years ago.

"What amazes me the most about the Battle of Okinawa exhibit on Camp Kinser is that it is always changing," said James D'Angina, 18th Wing Historian. "The all volunteer staff put a lot of time and effort in updating their displays. I have been down there on five occasions and there is always something new to see."