

"That's a keepsake from my sister"

Saipan: Tragic relics

[Naha, the 14th, by Correspondent Mikami] A photo album that was found and kept by an American in Saipan, the site of a mass military/civilian suicide, in the summer 27 years ago will soon be returned to the family in Okinawa, through an intermediary working for the Chūnichi Newspaper. The album belonged to a girl who committed suicide at Banzai Cliff. Her two younger brothers living in Okinawa said, "It is unbelievable that our sister's keepsake was found just before the 26th anniversary of the end of the war. We think of this album as her spirit, and we wish to pray for her during Obon Festival." The album, still bearing bullet holes, will be immediately sent back across the Pacific Ocean by airmail to Naha City.

In the hands of the bereaved family, 27 years later

Two surviving brothers in Okinawa

Joe Faulkner, who lives in Williamsburg, Kentucky, USA, came into possession of the album after the battle on Saipan Island in July 1944. He had been searching for a means for many years, hoping to return it to the deceased family.

He happened to meet a man named Yasuhiko Kaji who worked at a hospital in Toledo, Ohio, and through Kaji's introduction, he sent the album along with other belongings to the Chūnichi Newspaper Company, asking them to "find the owner or family."

The address on the cover of the postal savings passbook from that time, which was found together with the album, read "Kiyoko Uehara, 16th Neighborhood Association, Gualo Rai, South Garapan, Saipan." Inside the album was a photograph of Shigeyuki Uehara, who appeared to be a relative of Kiyoko.

This story was featured in the morning and evening editions of the Chūnichi Newspaper on the 13th. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's Relief Bureau and the Ryukyu Government's Health and Welfare Bureau investigated the name of Uehara Shigeyuki and found out on the 14th that Shigeyuki had already emigrated to Bolivia, South America, but that his two younger brothers had survived the mass suicide on Saipan and were still alive and well in Okinawa.

At the end of the Taisho Era, Tokushige Uehara went to Saipan as an agricultural immigrant. His second and third sons still remain. Masao (40), resides at 25 Orokutabaru, Naha City, and works in the dry-cleaning business. Muneo (38) lives at 312 Kadena, Kadena Village, and runs a diner. After losing their father in an accident in 1934, the brothers also lost their mother, Uto (45), their elder sisters, Yoshiko (19) and Kiyoko (17) (all ages at the time) in a tragic event on July 10, 1944, when they jumped into the sea from Saipan's Banzai Cliff. The owner of the photo album was their second sister, Kiyoko.

Kiyoko's belongings will soon be delivered to her brothers, Masao and Muneo, through the Naha branch of the company's headquarters, and an expression of gratitude will also be sent to Mr. Faulkner.

Disappearing into the sea, along with their mother Dressed in formal clothes of the Ryūkyū Gasuri

When Masao and Muneo heard that their sister Kiyoko's belongings had been delivered from the United States, they said, "It's absolutely unbelievable. Could it have been in an air-raid shelter? Or perhaps my mother or sister left them on the hill where they died... We would like to thank Mr. Faulkner, and place her belongings at the altar as soon as possible," they said, and reminisced as follows:

— In June 1944, after our house was burned down, we walked day after day towards the north of the island, searching for a cave to hide in. There were five of us in our family, excluding my brother, Shigeyuki, who was serving in the military in Java. On July 10, we had reached the northern end of the island, where there was nowhere else to go. I still remember my mother, who was cornered, saying, "We're going to tie everyone's hands with our sashes and jump in (to the sea), hold on tight." My sisters had washed and changed into their formal Ryūkyū Gasuri clothes. We both looked out to sea, desperately thinking of killing ourselves. Without having time to tie our hands with sashes, my mother and two sisters jumped into the sea, about 15 meters below, one after the other, and we followed them. However, both of us were good swimmers, so we couldn't die no matter what, and swam to the shore and tried to kill ourselves with a hand grenade. However, it didn't detonate. We went back to the sea. It still didn't work. Then we saw a family of 7 trying to kill themselves with a hand grenade, so we asked them to let us join, but they refused, so we jumped into the sea again. We gulped down seawater and dived, but we still couldn't die and were rescued by American soldiers. At that time, the bodies of our mother and sisters were bobbing in the waves. Masao was 10 years old at the time, and Muneo was 12.

After being rescued, Masao and his brother lived in an island camp until they landed at Uraga Port in March 1946. They stayed with relatives on Amami Oshima, and then moved to Okinawa in 1950. Their elder brother Shigeyuki (51) emigrated to Bolivia 11 years ago.

