

Listening to the *Shima* war stories

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The island of Amami Oshima is known for its abundant nature. However, few people know the fact that this beautiful island once had military stations, and that many war-related constructions remain. It was a few years ago that I came to know the fact from a conversation with a colleague. Then, I began to walk around the island to see war ruins, and I found that many of them were located near the villages, which means that the war happened right in front of the residents.

So, how did the people in the village experience the war? Although the relationship between the war stations and the local community can be found in fragments in collections written by local people about their war experiences, it is difficult to grasp the whole picture of what was happening in the villages. This is because, access by the general public to the military installation areas was greatly restricted, so that even the local people did not know the details. However, did the military installations have any impact on the daily lives of the *Shima*, considering that they were adjacent to the villages? If that were the case, how did the people of the *Shima* survive the war? These questions come to me one after another when I visited the war ruins.

In 2018, faculty and students studying cultural anthropology and archaeology at Kagoshima University formed a team to conduct interview surveys on the war in the *Shima* on Amami Oshima. The first interviews were conducted with people in their 70s to 90s living in Tatsugo town in December 2018. We mainly asked for their stories of living through the war and their memories of the battles. We were able to learn many aspects of the war in the *Shima* including stories of making bombproof shelters, escaping from air raids with their lives, school life during the war and after.

We also heard some episodes where even though the war was raging, they as children at the time played, made jokes and fooled around. One student mentioned that it reminded them of the war drama ‘In this Corner of the World’ at the discussion after the survey. It seemed that they could understand how people in *Shima* continued to live their lives in wartime, and how easily their daily life was threatened by massive violence—this is war.

Now that more than 70 years have passed since the end of the war, the number of those who directly experienced it is decreasing, and their voices are about to be lost. Therefore, it can be said that this is the last chance to directly listen to these war experiences. It is undoubtedly necessary to collect, as much as possible, the voices of how people survived the war and transcribe them so that anyone in the future will be able to “hear” them. Compiling records of the war in the *Shima* in this way will be important information to convey the war to those generations who did not experience it.

In addition, it is meaningful to think once again about the war on the island. Islands are often far from the center of the nation geographically and marginalized politically and economically. In states of emergency such as war, islands often become places that are easily abandoned as frontlines of the battlefield.

Therefore, thinking about the “War of the *Shima*” is important issue when considering the relationship between war and society. We together with our students would like to continue the surveys in collaboration with the local people in order to be able to pass on the history of the region and the stories of the war.



Students listening to the stories of war in the *Shima* (photographed by ISHIDA Tomoko)