

History of Camp Zama & U.S. Army in Japan

Prelude to Sobudai

The Rikugun Shikan Gakko – Japanese Imperial Military Academy – was the principal school of the former Imperial Japanese Army for military science studies and career officer training. It opened as an officer training school for the sons of the Kyoto nobility when Emperor Meiji (1852 – 1912) restored the sovereignty of the state from the Tokugawa Shogunate government in August 1868. As the school grew larger, it moved from Kyoto to Osaka and then to Tokyo.

In 1874, the Army Ministry of the Meiji Government built a modern occidental military Academy on the former estate of the Owari-Tokugawa at Ichigaya in Tokyo, where training in the French military system officially began the following year. Its training programs were modified when the Imperial Army adopted the Prussian military system in 1884.

In 1920, when the government revised the school law, the Academy changed its school year to begin in April instead of September and reorganized its curricula to include Yoka (junior) and Honka (senior) programs. Both programs included combat training at a regiment and were two years long.

The Yoka curriculum provided college level general education courses with basic military training which included traditional martial arts and horsemanship. It accepted 16- and 17-year-old boys who either completed the preparatory military school, known as the Rikugun Yonen Gakko, or the first four years of a five-year middle school education.

The young men completing the Yoka program were assigned three-month regimental duties to become familiar with Army weapons and platoon leadership before resuming studies in the Honka program.

In peacetime, students underwent both programs in four years and then received the rank of apprentice officers at graduation. They were then assigned to respective regiments and three months later were commissioned second lieutenants. In wartime,

the Academy often curtailed the schooling periods and increased the number of enrollees.

The Manchurian Incident broke out in September 1931 and by the mid-1930s, the Imperial Army had almost one million soldiers on the Asian continent. This presented an acute shortage in the officers' corps and the Ministry of the Army decided to expand the Academy. The Ichigaya campus was changed to the Rikugun Yoka Shikan Gakko – the Military Academy for Junior Program. It was later transferred to a new larger campus at Asaka in Saitama Prefecture to accommodate a greater number of students.

Two new campuses for senior programs were to be built outside of Tokyo. They were the Rikugun Koku Shikan Gakko – Military Academy for the senior aviation program – at Tokorozawa in Saitama Prefecture, which was shortly relocated to the more spacious Toyooka in the same prefecture. The other was the Rikugun Shikan Gakko – Military Academy for the senior Army program – at Zama in Kanagawa Prefecture.

Imperial Army Academy established

After land consisting of mulberry farms and forests was selected and purchased in 1935 for the future Academy an extensive construction project began in early 1936 primarily by Fujita Construction Company. Included was a road which had an ascent of four meters every 200 meters and a tunnel to the west of the main gate. Students later called this grade 'Hell's Slope' because it was hard to run up. The bulk of the construction was completed in the fall of 1937.

On September 30, 1937, the 50th class senior students moved from the Ichigaya campus to Zama to start their training at the new campus.

The billets located on the north side were used mostly by regular senior class students, while those on south side accommodated regular junior class and other students including those from foreign countries. One notable student was Park Chung Hee who graduated third in his class in 1944 and later became president of the Republic of Korea in 1961.

School life at the new campus was hard for students of the 50th class because construction was still underway. A large portion of the maneuver grounds was covered with tree stumps which cut into the students' bodies when they needed to drop to the ground during exercises. When it rained, the school grounds became muddy and gave out under their feet.

In late November after learning that Emperor Hirohito would attend the first graduation, it was decided to construct a new concrete highway from Japan Government Railways' Haramachida Station (now Machida Station) to the new Academy to welcome him for the first commencement exercise. The Ministry of

Railways hurriedly built a new platform at Haramachida Station exclusively for the Imperial train. Meanwhile, the Civil Engineering Department of Kanagawa Prefecture began an around-the-clock construction of Gyoko-Doro (Highway for the Imperial Visit).

On December 20, 1937, the Academy held its first graduation ceremony for 426 students of the 50th class with Emperor Hirohito, the 124th Emperor of Japan, in attendance.

On that day, Hirohito named the campus at Zama, *Sobudai* – military training heights in Sagami – after the name mentioned in the epic of Crown Prince Yamato Takeru (82 – 113 A.D.) this is described in the Ancient Chronicles of Japan (Kojiki). After this, Army Minister General Gen Sugiyama composed the name in three Chinese characters with a brush. However, locating a suitable monumental stone took more than two years and was finally found in Yamanashi Prefecture and with delivery to the Academy cost ¥10,000. A stonecutter from Koshu completed the inscription and on August 20, 1940, *Sobudai* monument was officially dedicated.

With the emperor's visit, Zama Village retroactively became Zama Town that same day though it was originally scheduled to do so on February 11, 1938. In a short while, the local people renamed the Academy's neighborhood area *Sobudai* and railway lines changed their station names to Sobudai-Mae Station and Sobudai-Shita Station (Mae means in front of and Shita means below).

Meanwhile, the areas surrounding the Academy were also turned into military and industrial communities. They included Sagami Army Arsenal (presently Sagami General Depot), an Imperial Army communication school (presently Sagami Women's College), telegraph regiment (presently Sagamihara Family Housing Area), and an armor equipping school (later serving as Camp Fuchinobe for the U.S. Army from 1945 to November 1974). There were also two Army hospitals. One hospital is now the National Sagamihara Hospital, and the other served as the U.S. Army Medical Center at Sagami-Ono from 1945 until March 1981. The center was later turned into a housing complex by Sagamihara City.

With the China War theater expanding, the Academy increased its enrollees each year from the 426 students in Class 50 in 1937 to 1,824 students in a class by 1945. The records at Kaikosha, the association of the Academy's alumni, show that from 1937 to 1945, 18,476 cadets were trained at *Sobudai* and 8,956 men at the Air Academy in Toyooka. The combined number of students was greater than the cumulative number of students (22,585) who had been trained at Ichigaya in 63 years. By 1945 there were 20 companies of students being trained annually.

The area also became the base for a portion of the 53rd Corps which was assigned the mission of protecting the land surrounding Sagami Bay and repulse any attackers in the event of an Allied invasion.

In April 1945, several teachers and students were killed or injured in an air raid and the intensifying air raids interrupted school activities. In June, as a precautionary measure against Allied bombings and invasion, Academy officials sent the entire staff and 3,000 students on a long-term bivouac into the mountainous regions of Nagano Prefecture. They pulled down Otakebi Shrine, which was located on the present Chapel Hill area, and transferred its sacred items to a Shinto shrine in Nagano. The *Sobudai* campus was left in care of a small unit of soldiers. On August 15, the Academy staff and students in Nagano were informed of Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allies and they disbanded on August 30, 1945.

At *Sobudai*, the remaining soldiers were concerned that U.S. occupation forces might dispose of the *Sodudai* monument so they buried it behind its foundation along with two alabaster lion statues that were located to the sides of the auditorium entrance.

U.S. Army presence begins

On September 5, 1945, one battalion of the 1st Cavalry Division of the U.S. Army entered *Sobudai* campus and took control of the Academy from the Japanese soldiers guarding it. In order to negotiate disarmament and to assume command from the remaining Imperial Army soldiers, the 1st Cavalry Division commander accompanied the first Soldiers to meet face-to-face with the lieutenant general Academy commandant. Unfortunately, the commandant was transferred just days prior and negotiations continued with a major as the senior Japanese Army officer. Several Japanese personnel were employed to put the school grounds in order. Shortly thereafter, a smaller unit replaced the 1st Cavalry and, for a while, the post was named the 4th Replacement Regiment Depot. Later, the name was changed to Camp Zama, whose main mission, along with Atsugi Base, was to serve as a stopover for Soldiers awaiting transportation to and from the Far East.

When Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, commanding general of Eighth Army then stationed at Yokohama, learned in 1947 that the *Sobudai* monument had been located he ordered it to be restored to its original pedestal.

In 1948 construction was begun using the forested areas around and to the east of Otakebi Shrine for family housing and south for the chapel. The old maneuver grounds where the Emperor had once watched Academy student exercises was transformed into the golf course in 1950.

After the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, Camp Zama once again became a logistics and staging area for troops, including those of the 1st Cavalry and the 7th, 24th and 40th Infantry Divisions, on their way to Korea.

In February 1952 a fire broke out from a heating boiler on South Camp Zama destroying five buildings of the former Academy. At that time, U.S. Army Far East Headquarters in downtown Yokohama was searching for a more suitable location in the

countryside. Consequently, it was decided to construct a new headquarters building on South Camp Zama and entrusted the design to Raymond Architectural Design Company with construction done by several large firms including Takenaka, Kashima and Nishimatsu Construction Companies. The command relocated from Yokohama in October 1953 and began occupying Building 101 which has served as United States Army Japan headquarters ever since as well as Building 102.

Also that year, IX Corps was assigned to U.S. Army Forces, Far East, on Camp Zama and an airfield was built on a hill on the northwest corner of the installation which became operational in 1954 with a 1,500 foot runway. It would become known as Rankin Army Airfield named for Major Thomas S. Rankin. In 1956 after just two years, IX Corps was reassigned to Ryukyu Command Headquarters in Okinawa.

During the 1960s, Camp Zama, along with Sagami General Depot and the hospital at Sagami-Ono, experienced increased activity as the Vietnam War escalated. Soldiers were sent here for further medical care and R&R (rest and recuperation), and Sagami General Depot was a logistical supply center for the war.

Another USARJ reorganization came September 1, 1969, when it began operating under a new structure designed to increase efficiency of operations without eliminating its existing missions or functions. The new structure incorporated four major commands plus the functions of the headquarters staff sections, commonly known as general staff, into a single system comprised of 11 directorates and the U.S. Army Medical Department Activity, Japan.

With the signing of a joint utilization document on July 29, 1971, by Brigadier General Hugh A. Richeson, commanding general of USARJ, and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Lieutenant General Gosaku Takedatsu, commanding general of Eastern Army, Camp Zama was designated a U.S.–Japan bilateral use facility. After 26 years absence, about 250 JGSDF personnel from the 102nd Construction Battalion (which became the 3rd Engineer Group the next year) and other units began relocating to Camp Zama in October 1971.

A major change in the Army's command and organizational structure in the Pacific occurred on May 15, 1972, in conjunction with the return of Okinawa to Japanese control after 27 years of administration by the United States. USARJ acquired control of all missions and functions previously assigned to U.S. Army Ryukyus.

With the realignment, U.S. Army Ryukyus and Second Logistical Command were inactivated and those former elements were merged to form U.S. Army Base Command, Okinawa, a subordinate command of USARJ. In addition, under the complex reorganization that accompanied reversion, IX Corps was transferred from Okinawa and collocated with U.S. Army Japan to form U.S. Army, Japan/IX Corps at Camp Zama, Japan, on June 30.

A USARJ reorganization established three subordinate commands on July 1, 1974: U.S. Army Garrison, Honshu (USAGH); U.S. Army Garrison, Okinawa (USAGO); and U.S. Army Medical Department Activity-Japan, (MEDDAC-JAPAN). For USAGH, U.S. Army Garrison Kanto Plain; Transportation Activity, Japan; Army Ammunition Depot Complex Akizuki; Procurement Agency, Japan; and Army Supply and Maintenance Activity, Sagami, were inactivated and their activities incorporated into the new organization.

After the discontinuance of U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) in the wake of the Southeast Asia conflict drawdown, USARJ was designated a major Army command on January 1, 1975, reporting directly to Department of the Army. On February 28, 1977, U.S. Army Hospital, Camp Kuwae, Okinawa, was transferred to the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army Medical Department Activity, Japan, was disestablished, leaving USARJ with two subordinate commands, U.S. Army Garrison, Honshu, and U.S. Army Garrison, Okinawa.

In memory of Brig. Gen. Joseph H. Kastner who died December 1, 1980, Rankin Army Airfield was renamed in his honor. Kastner had served as deputy commander of U.S. Army Japan and IX Corps from June 20, 1978 to September 18, 1980.

With the establishment of a bilateral command post exercise named Yama Sakura (Mountain Cherry) in 1982 and through successive annual bilateral exercises such as the Orient Shield series which began in 1985, USARJ/IX Corps and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force have developed a closer bilateral relationship.

On January 16, 1986, U.S. Army Garrison, Honshu, was provisionally reorganized as the 9th Area Support Group (Provisional). The 35th Supply and Service Battalion (Provisional), at Sagami General Depot, and 196th Ordnance Battalion (Provisional), located at Akizuki, were also established this date. On October 15, 1987, the 9th Area Support Group inactivated and was replaced by the reactivated 17th Area Support Group while the 35th Supply and Service Battalion lost their provisional designation.

On August 30, 1990, USARPAC was reestablished and USARJ became a major subordinate command of that headquarters while continuing as the Army Component Command of U.S. Forces, Japan (USFJ).

As part of a reorganization of U.S. Army Systems Command, the U.S. Army Signal battalions in Japan were redesignated as the 58th Signal Battalion in Okinawa and the 78th Signal Battalion on mainland Japan, under the 516th Signal Brigade in Hawaii. Operational control remained with the commander, USARJ/IX Corps.

On November 1, 1994, 9th Theater Army Area Command (TAACOM) was activated to enhance USARJ's ability to perform its two main missions: defense of Japan and support regional contingencies and coordinating reception, staging, and onward movement of U.S. Army forces in the Pacific with logistics bases in mainland Japan and Okinawa.

On January 17, 1995, a magnitude 6.9 earthquake struck the port city of Kobe. Known as the Great Hanshin Earthquake, relief supplies were dispatched through the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force to aid Japanese citizens affected by the earthquake. More than 42,000 blankets, 37,000 gallons of water, 177 rolls of plastic sheeting, and 20 large tents were assembled by 35th Supply & Service Battalion and 17th Area Support Group Soldiers and civilian employees within 36 hours. Only requested relief supplies were sent to Kobe to aid in the wake of the disaster.

To handle the intended transition of I Corps to Japan, I Corps Liaison Detachment was established on August 22, 1995. On November 15, 1995, IX Corps inactivated and its duties, including those as the war-fighters in the Pacific region, were fully absorbed by 9th TAACOM which was later redesignated 9th Theater Support Command (TSC) on October 16, 2000, when 9th TAACOM and 310th TSC merged.

To promote efficiency, the 35th Supply and Service Battalion split June 26, 1998, when the 35th Heavy Material Supply Detachment Sagami (Provisional) was activated. The detachment was tasked with the responsibility for receipt, storage and care of supplies in storage, inspection and classification as well as monitoring hazardous material and waste.

On March 27, 2001, JGSDF's 3rd Engineer Group was inactivated, and the 4th Engineer Group relocated from Camp Utsunomiya in Tochigi Prefecture to Camp Zama.

U.S. Army Garrison, Japan was activated October 15, 2002, replacing the inactivated 17th Area Support Group, and fell under the Pacific Region Office, Installation Management Command, and tasked with providing quality installation services and support to Soldiers, civilians and families to ensure mission readiness and well-being of the Army community.

During 2006, the 296th Army Band and 78th Aviation Battalion were assigned to USARJ on June 30 and October 1 respectively and the 35th Supply and Services Battalion was reorganized as the 35th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion on October 10.

The 9th TSC inactivated on September 15, 2007. Later, I Corps (Forward) was organized and activated on November 25, 2009, in line with the Army's transformation efforts.

A devastating magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami struck the northeast coast of Japan on March 11, 2011. Within minutes, USARJ began humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in support of the JGSDF during *Operation Tomodachi*, Japan's largest-ever bilateral operation. USARJ supported the affected people after operations officially ended by providing equipment and maintenance support to the JGSDF until September 2011.

The JGSDF presence increased on March 26, 2013, when the Central Readiness Force headquarters moved from Camp Asaka in Saitama Prefecture to Camp Zama.

On March 30, 2016, I Corps (Forward) separated from USARJ and moved temporarily to Sagami General Depot to build and validate capabilities.

Following the magnitude 6.2 foreshock on April 14, 2016, the next day a magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck Kumamoto City in the Kyushu region. The USARJ liaison officer assigned to JGSDF's Western Army and a visiting exercise planning team immediately began coordination for U.S. forces support. A USARJ UC-35 aircraft was the first U.S. military flight to arrive transporting Ground Staff Office and Joint Staff Office members.

While changes will occur in the future, your Army in Japan continues to be a strong and dedicated partner with the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force and trusted force to meet its obligation to the Japan-U.S. security treaty aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.