

for the cliffs. From the top of a hill we could see some sort of caves along the crest of the opposite hill. These caves turned out to be burial tombs of the Okinawans. As I got in one of them there was a booby trap right in the center of the entrance that scared hell ~~out~~ out of me. I missed it by about two feet. When I got my second breath I walked around it without trying to find out whether it was a live or a dead trap. The tomb was a stink'in hole with corroded ~~body~~ bodies. Most of them



Burial tombs like the ones dad mistook for caves at first

In letter 14, page 9, dad tells mom that he's done hunting for souvenirs.



© Adam Lewis

Tomb at Naha, Okinawa

Above: A burial tomb (this style is called "turtle back").

We examined the wire and saw that it stretched from a stake on one side of the road to a 500-pound bomb on the other. When we continued down the road, we spotted three more of these booby traps :

Excerpt above is from Gerald Astor - "Operation Iceberg"



The photo below shows cave entrances that were hiding Japanese suicide boats. The entrance on the left has a booby trap warning written above it by U.S. soldiers

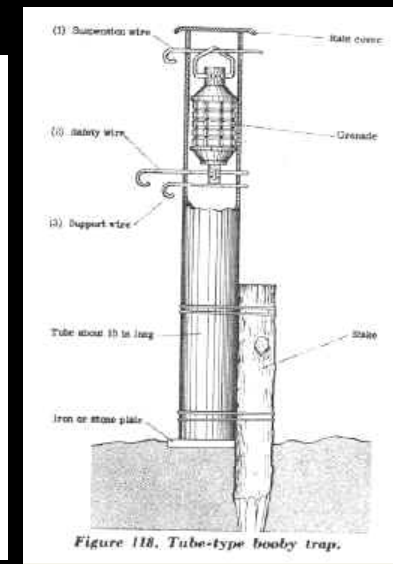
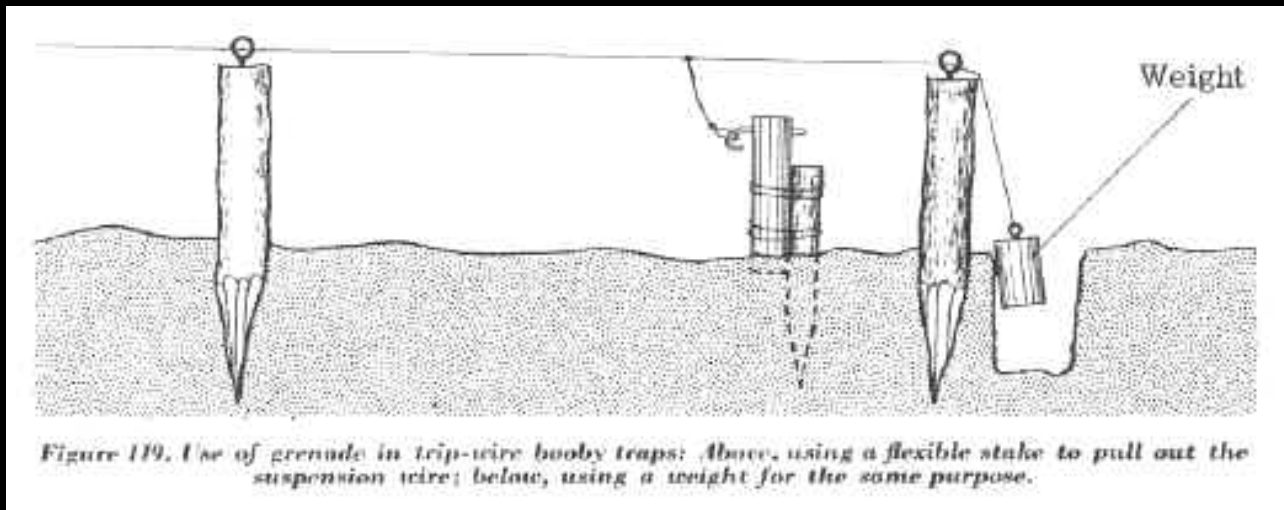


model 97 Japanese hand grenade

Japanese booby trap found on Okinawa: A Grenade hidden in a cabbage still growing in the ground

Japanese Booby Traps Used in WW2

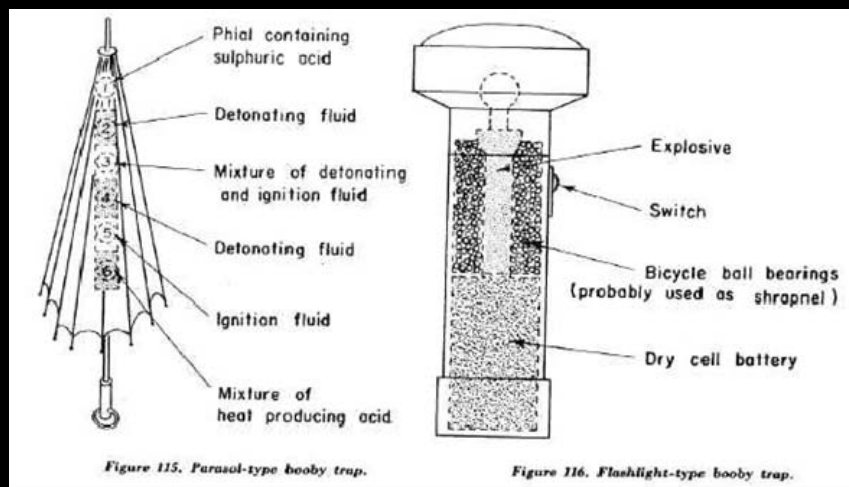
Japanese booby traps were being employed with increasing frequency and ingenuity. With the American success in taking back territory previously won by Japan, the Japanese resorted to booby trapping areas before vacating. Many of these traps relied on the natural curiosity of American soldiers and were employed in items that an unsuspecting GI would pick up and activate. Some examples of these include booby trapped parasols (umbrellas), flashlights, tin cans, vegetables still growing in the ground, and any number of items that could be rigged to have the detonating pin pulled out or could be wired to a battery. Various riggings were devised that employed trip wires tied to grenades and the electrical ignition of booby traps rigged to clothespins, radios, bottles, and nearly anything else that a souvenir craving GI might pick up. Any tomb or cave could have had live trip-wires strung in it and any number of items in the caves that dad collected souvenir items from could have been booby trapped (dad found this out first hand in the tomb). Dad later writes about taking Japanese military items off of dead Japanese soldiers in the caves, but he never took anything from the tombs.



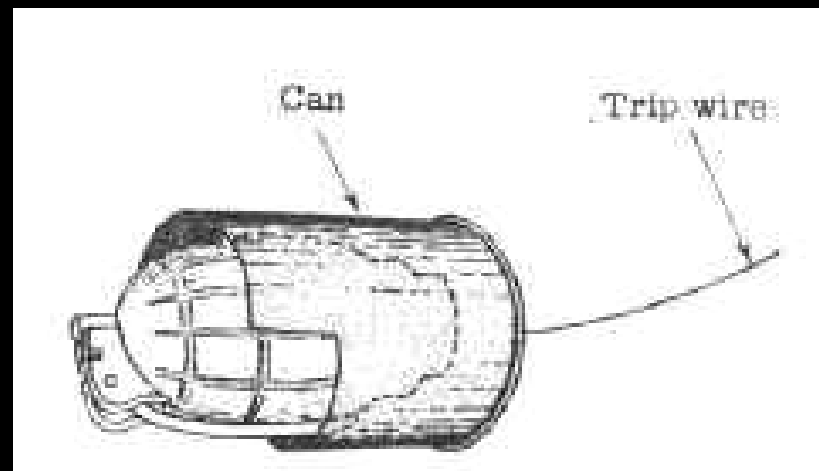
“When we reached the caves I had a cold sweat from what I saw. Jap bodies were piled on one another like a bunch of wet blankets. In this one cave there were at least 20 dead Japs. I turned a few bodies over to see if I could find anything I would like to keep. Although I managed to take back a helmet and a gas mask, along with a few other things, I don’t believe I’ll keep them for long because if I keep all the things I find, I’ll have to hire a boat to ship them home.”

- Corporal Joseph P. Pizzimenti Okinawa August, 1945

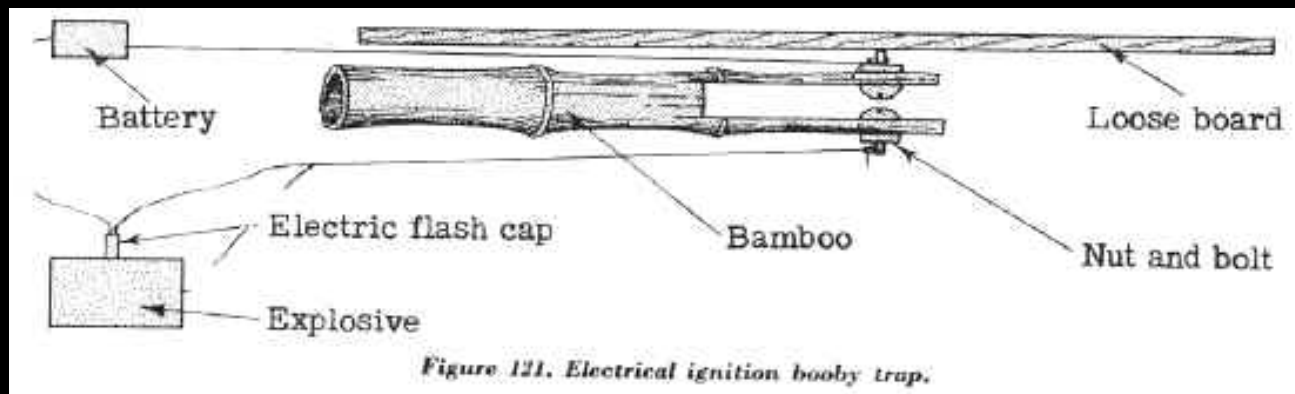
Japanese Booby Traps Used in WW2



Booby trapped umbrella and flashlight



Booby trapped tin can



“As I got in one of them, there was a booby trap right in the center of the entrance that scared the hell out of me. I missed it by about 2 feet. I walked around it without trying to find out whether it was a live or dead trap.”
*-Corporal Joseph P Pizzimenti
 Okinawa, August, 1945*

Many items in the caves could have been rigged as the items above. Because the Japanese soldiers on Okinawa defended the island to the death and never relinquished territory, the setting of these traps was probably less of a threat than in other campaigns (Booby Traps were a way of killing GI's long after a retreat). Dad found many dead Japanese soldiers in the caves because there was no retreat on Okinawa, and many of the dead killed themselves by exploding their own grenades against their abdomens. Never the less, souvenir hunting was an unnecessary risk for any GI to take that survived the war up to this point.

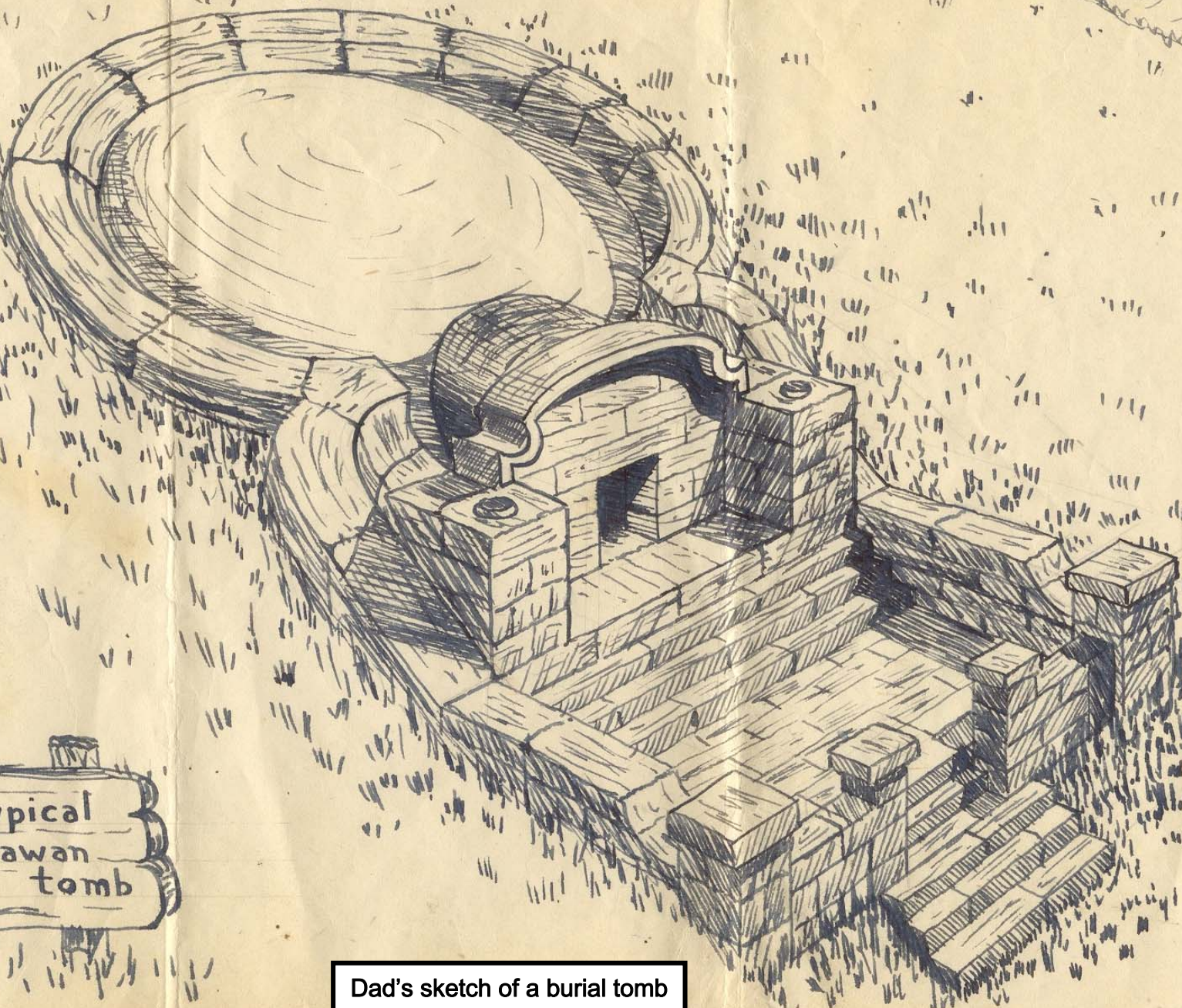
**“From the top of a hill we could see some sort of caves
along the crest of the opposite hill. These caves turned
out to be burial tombs of the Okinawans.”**

- Corporal Joseph P. Pizzimenti (August, 1945)



A typical
Okinawan
Burial tomb

Dad's sketch of a burial tomb



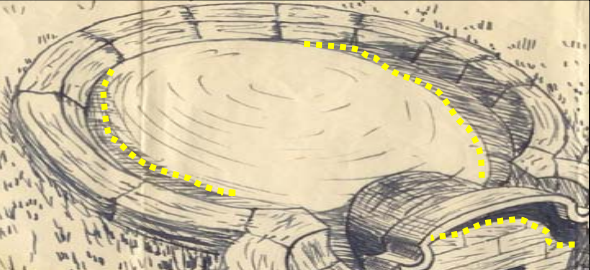
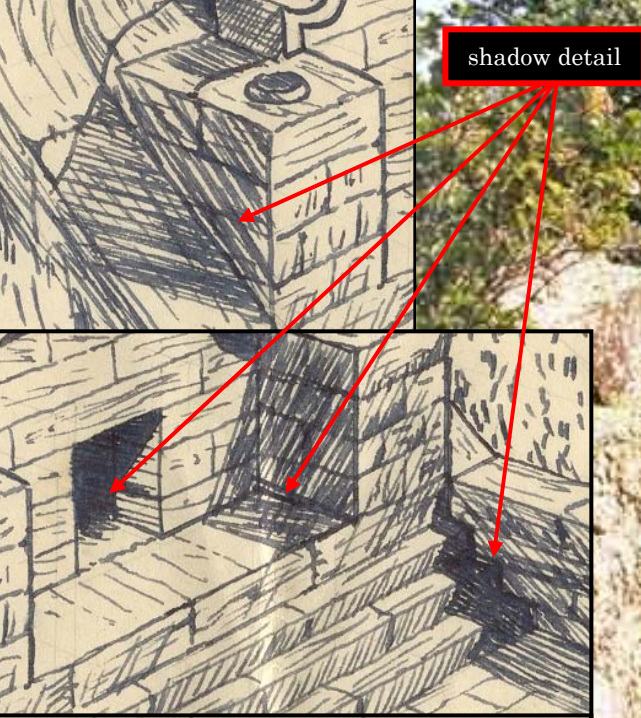


“These...turned out to be the burial tombs of the Okinawans. As I got in one of them there was a booby trap right in the center of the entrance that scared the hell out of me” - Corporal Joseph P. Pizzimenti - Okinawa, August 1945



This style of Okinawan tomb is called a turtleback tomb because of its domed roof resembling that of a turtle's shell. There were some variations on smaller details, but the main features of the design were the same.

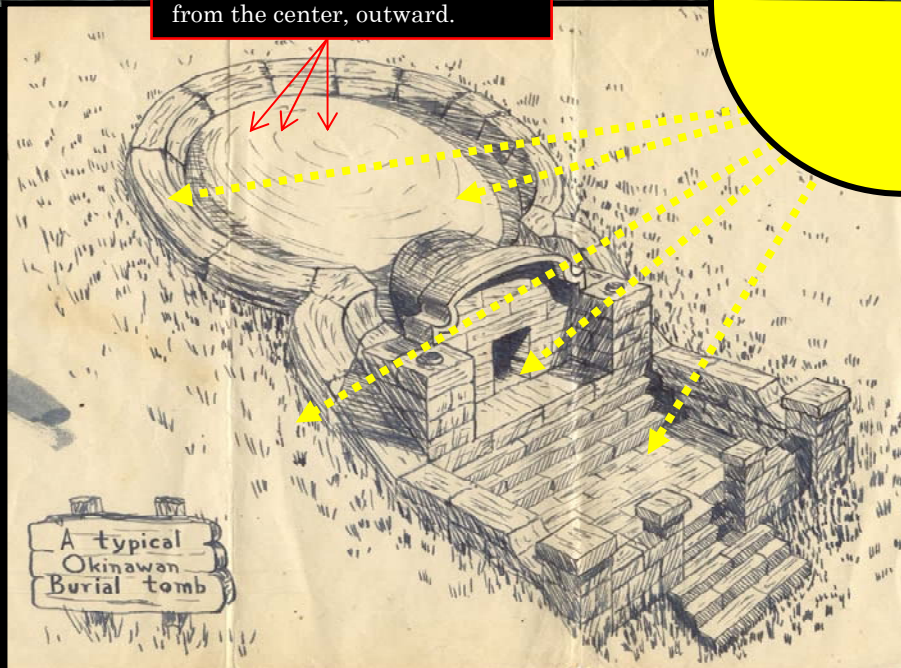




In addition to the shadow detail being used to imply a dome, dad used concentric circles radiating from the center, outward.

Above: A turtleback tomb that's similar to the one that dad sketched.

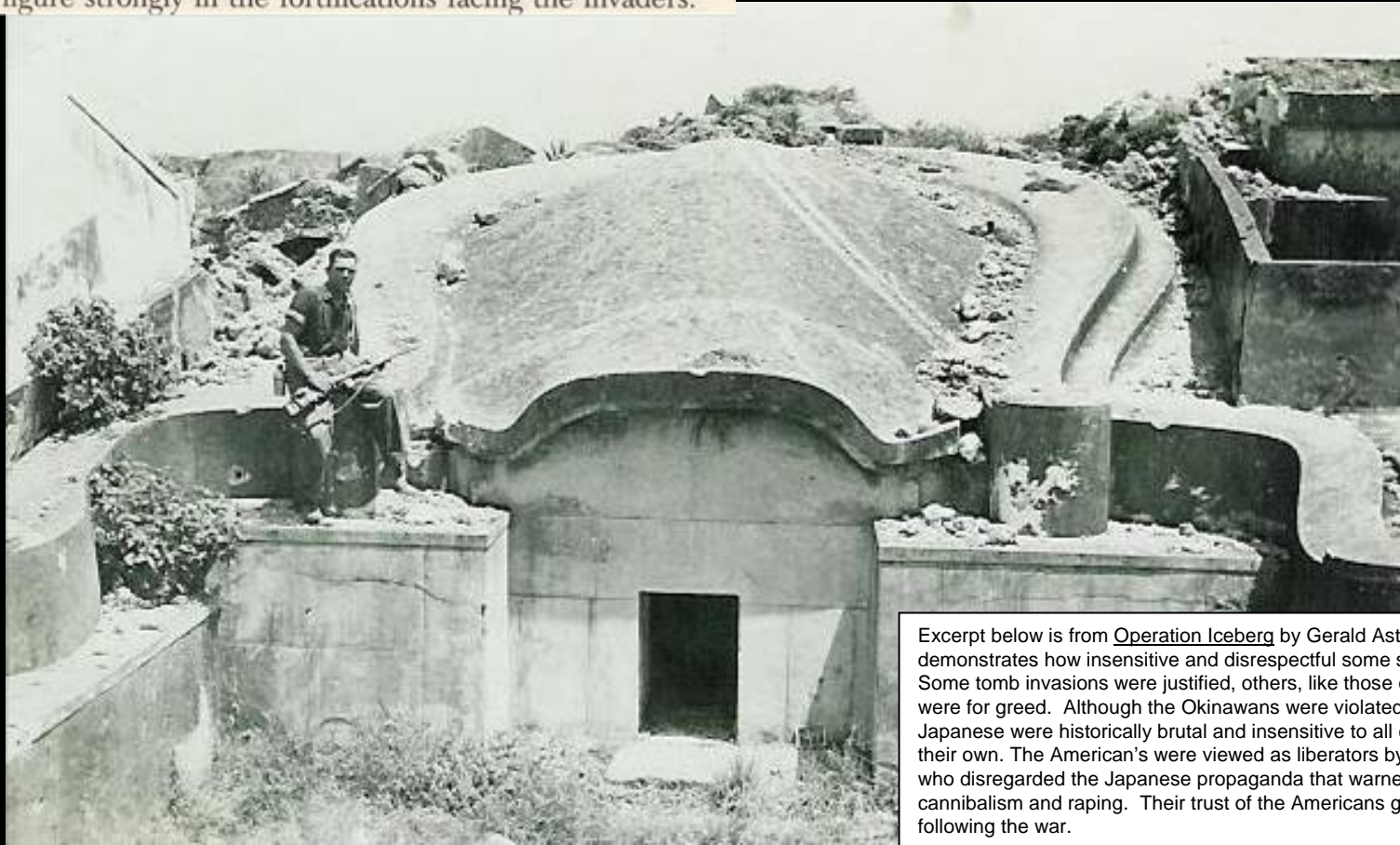
Left: Shadow details in sketch



Note how dad included shadowing details even in this simple sketch. He drew the sunlight as coming from a low angle that was near the top right corner of the drawing. Dad's attention to this detail also aided him in portraying the domed shape of the roof. Without the shadow detail being added to the roof, it would still have appeared circular, but the dome shape would have been less evident, if not lost. Notice how his rendering of the roof clearly implies the contour of a dome (or turtle shell). The darkened left edge of the sunlit dome suggests this downward curve as it arcs down into shadow, escaping the sun's rays. The right edge of the dome is in shadow because of the stone wall surrounding the dome.

The indigenous people resemble but do not duplicate the racial stock of the Japanese and the local culture is a mix that includes Chinese influence. Veneration of ancestors, a strong element in the people's religion, stimulated the construction of elaborate concrete burial tombs, which would figure strongly in the fortifications facing the invaders.

Excerpts from Operation Iceberg by Gerald Astor



Excerpt below is from Operation Iceberg by Gerald Astor and demonstrates how insensitive and disrespectful some soldiers could be. Some tomb invasions were justified, others, like those of the soldier below, were for greed. Although the Okinawans were violated by both armies, the Japanese were historically brutal and insensitive to all cultures other than their own. The American's were viewed as liberators by most Okinawans who disregarded the Japanese propoganda that warned of American cannibalism and raping. Their trust of the Americans grew in the months following the war.

As the excerpt at the top explains, the Okinawan people worshiped their ancestors and kept their bodies inside concrete tombs. These tombs were exploited by Japanese soldiers who used them as pill boxes from which to attack Americans. They were violated by Americans as well who didn't realize or were unconcerned that they were trespassing on sacred ground. To a degree however, American searches of tombs were necessary and proper in order to secure the island from snipers and holdouts.

"When we got to areas where we stayed for a few days," Rice continues, "I would go out on my little tours, most of the time taking somebody with me. I usually went to the tombs because that's where most everything was. I didn't realize there were so many damn snakes though. I'd go into there, get my souvenirs. I sent my cousin a whole bunch of beautiful silks, one of the flag with a painting on it. The folks at home loved everything until they found out that it came from the tombs. Then they threw it all in the garbage. That really teed me off. They coulda wrapped it up and saved it for me.

trap. The tomb was a stink' in hole with corroded ~~body~~ bodies. Most of them

3

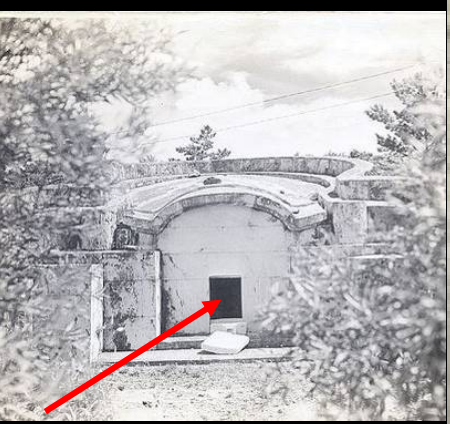
were bones. The bones were in vases of different shapes and colors with an alter in the center. I hope this sketch is clear: Okay? ☹

After they have their ceremony the body is put ⁱⁿ the tomb sitting up. When the body becomes a skeleton they are, or I should say, the bones are put in a vase or urn and on the steps or alter whatever you want to call them as I illustrated in the cross section of the tomb. **Note: the cross section drawing has been lost over the years.**

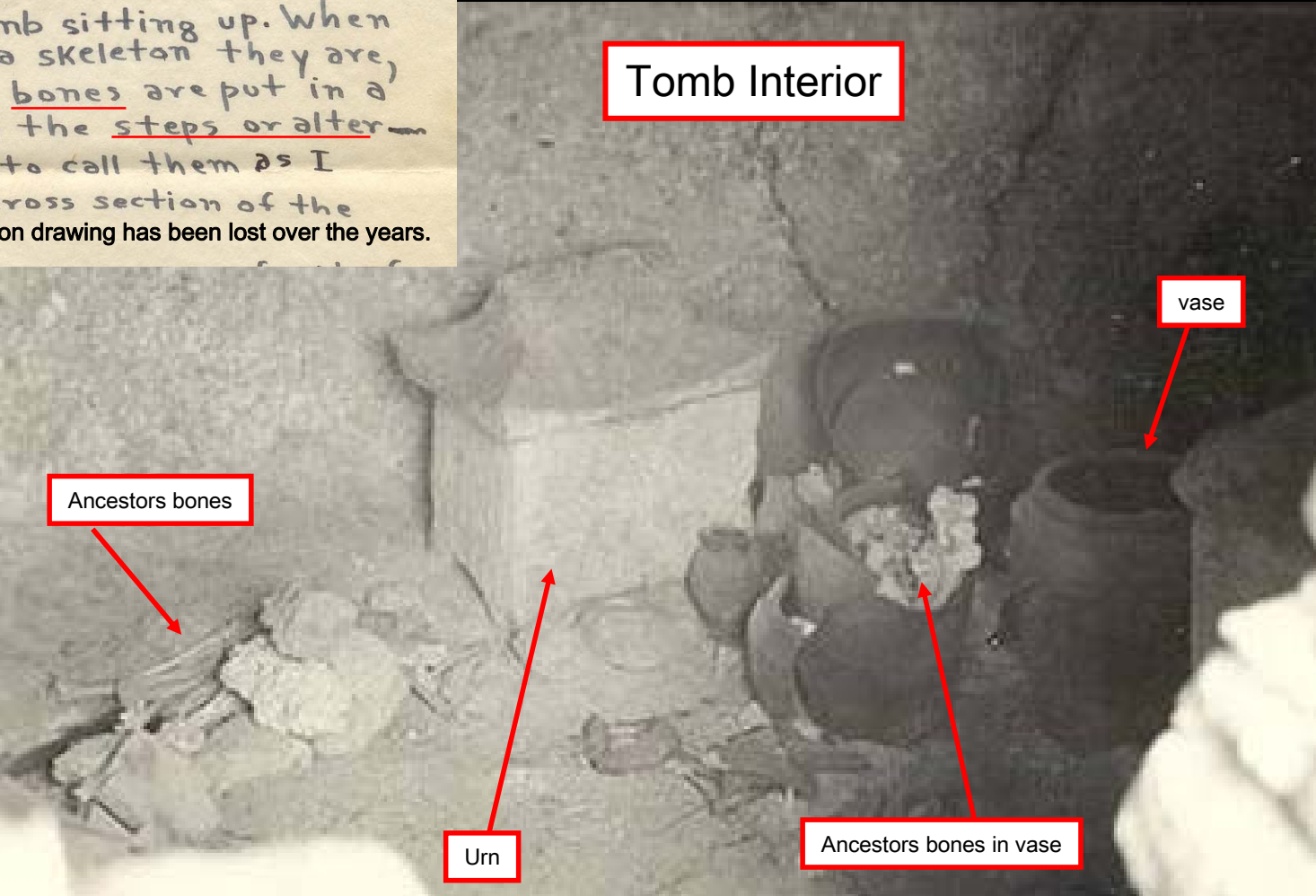
indignant.) Although Jesus, Allah, and Confucius had been to Okinawa, their missionaries persuaded few if any natives to renounce their primitive animist religion based on a mystical reverence for fire and hearth and worship of the bones of their ancestors. These were placed in urns kept inside fairly large lyre-shaped tombs, which the Japanese, with their customary indifference to the feelings of any race but their own, began to fortify

-from Okinawa, by Robert Leckie

Tomb Interior



Under the sloping roof of a turtle-back tomb you'll notice a small, rectangular door. Inside the door are carefully arranged urns containing the remains of family members.



Ancestors bones

vase

Urn

Ancestors bones in vase

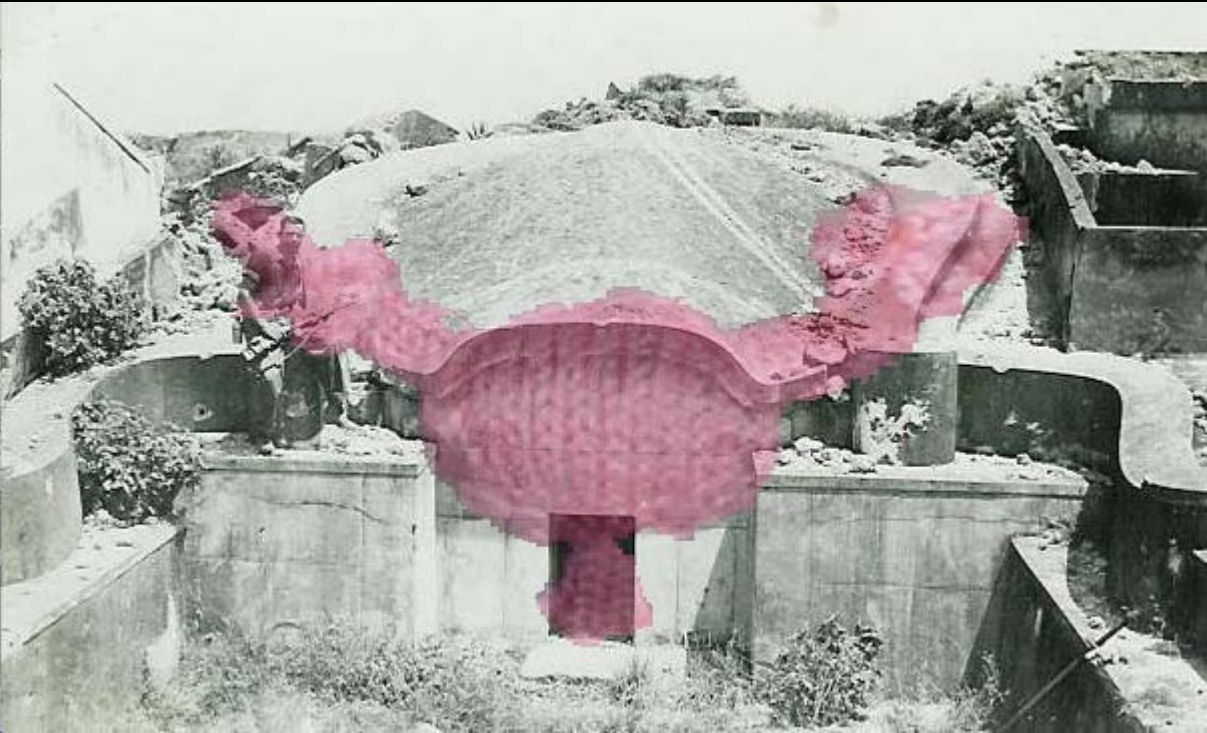


Okinawa 1945

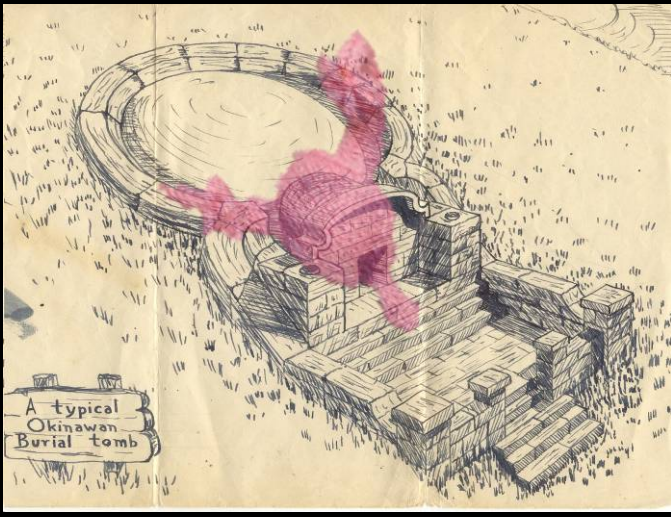
American soldier speaking on a mobile radio next to a tomb entrance strewn with clay jars containing human bones which are used by the local inhabitants as burial receptacles.

“...the bones were in vases of different shapes and colors...”

- Corporal Joseph P. Pizzimenti Okinawa - August, 1945



The distinctive shape of the tomb is designed to resemble a woman's womb. Why? The idea is you came from the womb, so when you die, you're symbolically going right back to birth.



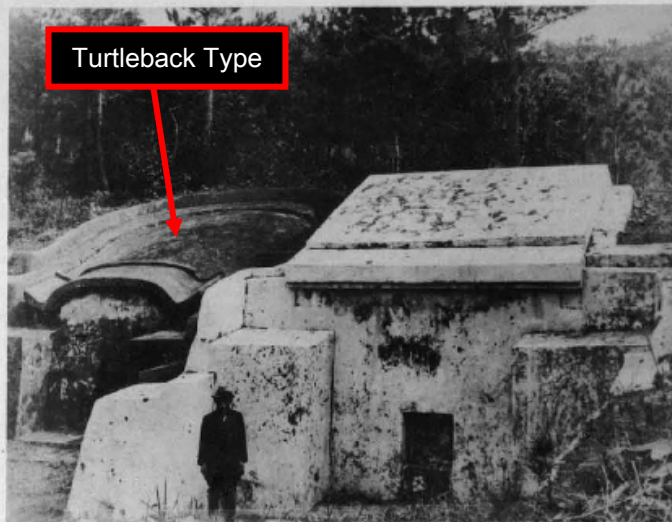


The urn on exterior alter

“The bones are put in a vase or urn and on the steps or alter.”
-Corporal Joseph P. Pizzimenti Okinawa, August 1945

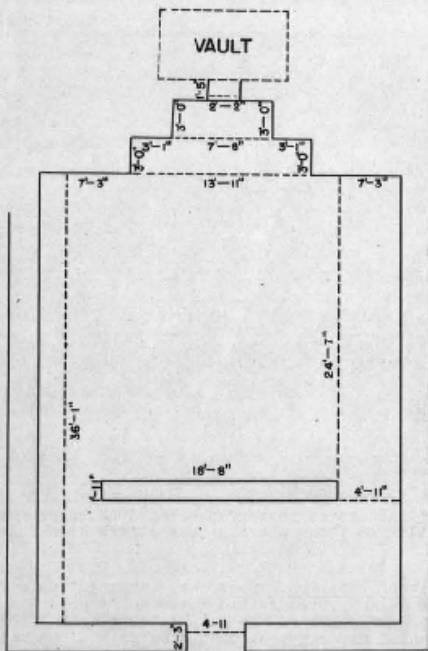
J. Potential positions: Burial vaults. Numerous limestone structures, of or similar to the type illustrated, exist on OKINAWA SHIMA. These have potentialities as strong points and may serve as mobile artillery positions, machine gun nests, pillboxes, or personnel shelters. From the air they are easily mistaken for gun emplacements. Approach to the burial vault is usually made through a court, approximately 30' by 35 feet, surrounded by a stone wall two to three feet thick. The vault itself is a limestone chamber, entrance to which is gained by a small opening about two feet across, looking out upon the court. Walls and roof of the vault are probably two feet or more in thickness. Strafing, rockets, fragmentation bombs, would be effective weapons against personnel in the court. Probably bombs of 500 pounds or larger will be necessary against the vault. Earth shock from near misses by large bombs may seriously damage the structures.

Naval gunfire should be very effective against these positions exposed to the sea.

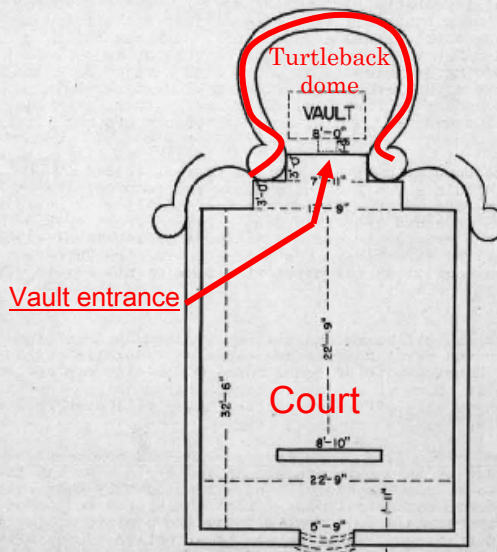


Typical mausoleums near NAHA. At the left is an example of the turtle-back type; the other is of the pitch-roof type.

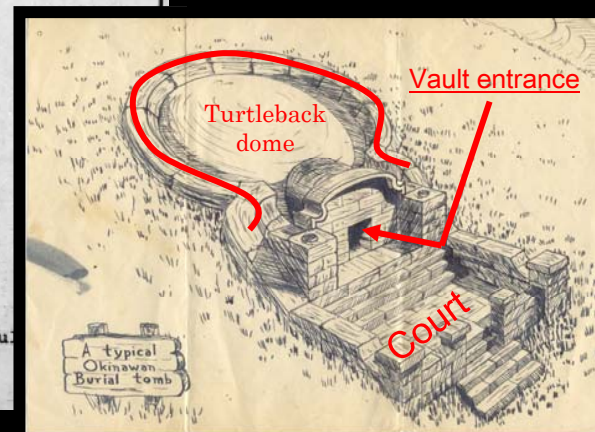
see next slide for enlarged text of above



Plan of pitch-roof type mausoleum.



Plan of turtle-back type mausoleum and vault.



Pre-invasion classified documents covered numerous aspects of the coming battle. On this page, commanders were informed that these burial tombs would be used as fortifications by the Japanese Army for artillery fire, machine gun nests, and other types of weapons. It also listed the best type of bombs to employ in the destruction of these Japanese posts; a morally difficult decision considering that these were family tombs of the Okinawan civilians. But the Japanese, with typical disregard for any culture not their own, chose to militarize the tombs thus making them necessary targets.

OKINAWA GUNTO. CINCPAC-CINCPAQ BULLETIN 161-44. 15 NOVEMBER 1944.

Pre-invasion military analysis of Okinawa included instructions on the explosive firepower required to destroy these burial tombs if the Japanese used them as fortifications for their artillery. Unfortunately, war often presents moral dilemma's. Should Japanese soldiers be allowed to kill more Americans by sniping and shelling from their positions inside these *protective bunkers*? Or should Japanese use of these tombs be discouraged by showing them that we will destroy the structures? Either way, the Okinawan people who suffered so much at the hands of the Japanese and in the crossfire of the American invasion, were further victimized. (Similar dilemma's exist today in Iraq were American casualties are higher due to our reluctance to attack religious sites even though it's known that terrorists use them as sanctuary.)

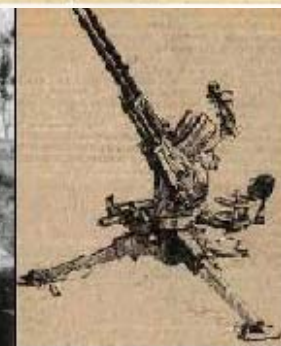
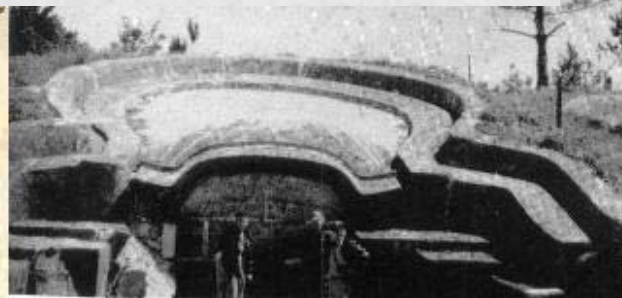
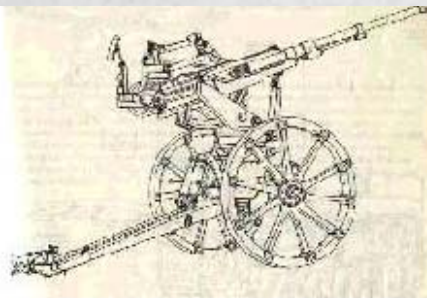
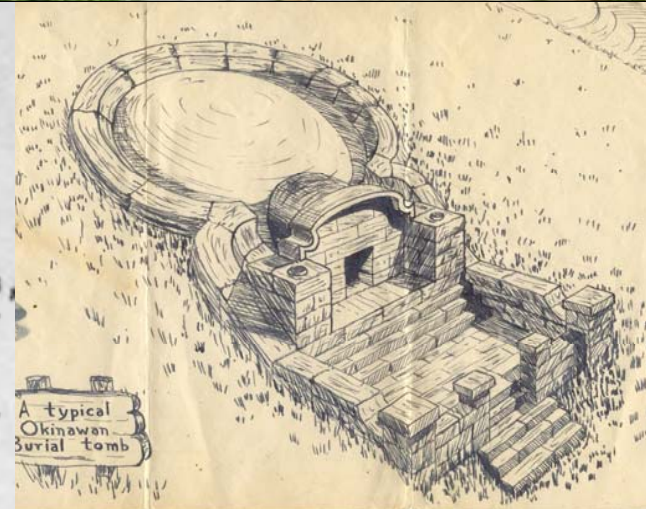


J. Potential positions: Burial vaults. Numerous limestone structures, of or similar to the type illustrated, exist on OKINAWA SHIMA. These have potentialities as strong points and may serve as mobile artillery positions, machine gun nests, pillboxes, or personnel shelters. From the air they are easily mistaken for gun emplacements. Approach to the burial vault is usually made through a court, approximately 30' by 35 feet, surrounded by a stone wall two to three feet thick. The vault itself is a limestone chamber, entrance to which is gained by a small opening about two feet across, looking out upon the court. Walls and roof of the vault are probably two feet or more in thickness. Strafing, rockets, fragmentation bombs,

would be effective weapons against personnel in the court. Probably bombs of 500 pounds or larger will be necessary against the vault. Earth shock from near misses by large bombs may seriously damage the structures.

Naval gunfire

should be very effective against those positions exposed to the sea.



One of the Okinawan tombs I mentioned. The Japanese used to set up AA guns and machine guns there and then pull them inside of the tombs themselves when under fire. You can see where they are very heavily constructed and serve as excellent fortifications. They would set the guns up in the entry way.



USMC infantrymen resting near a tomb entrance during the fierce fighting that took place in the battle for Okinawa. The large rifle in the foreground is a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). (May 1945)

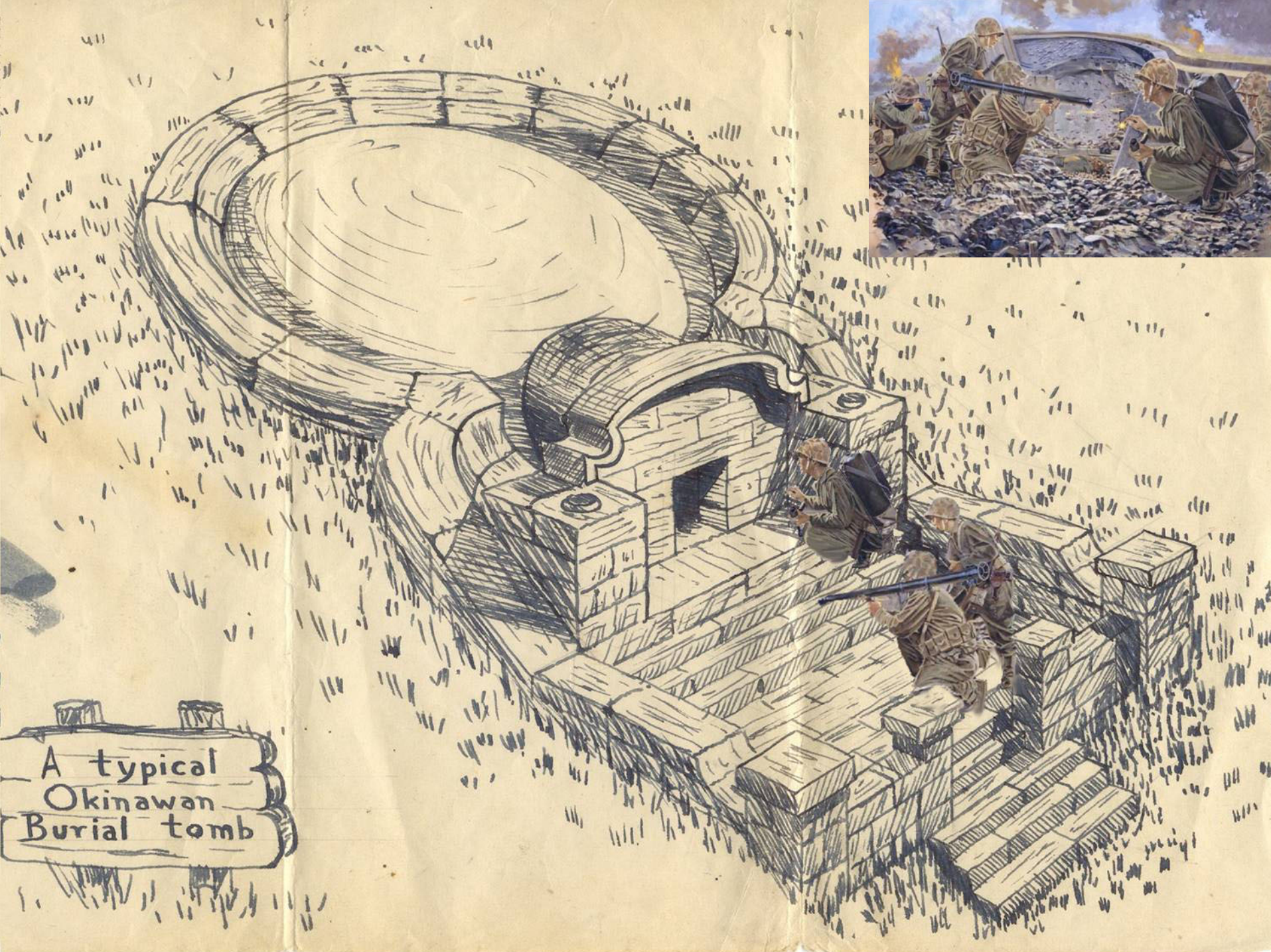


Above: Dad's sketch is used and altered to aid in making the photo's setting more clear.

Left: The tomb entrance is visible above the soldier's left shoulder.



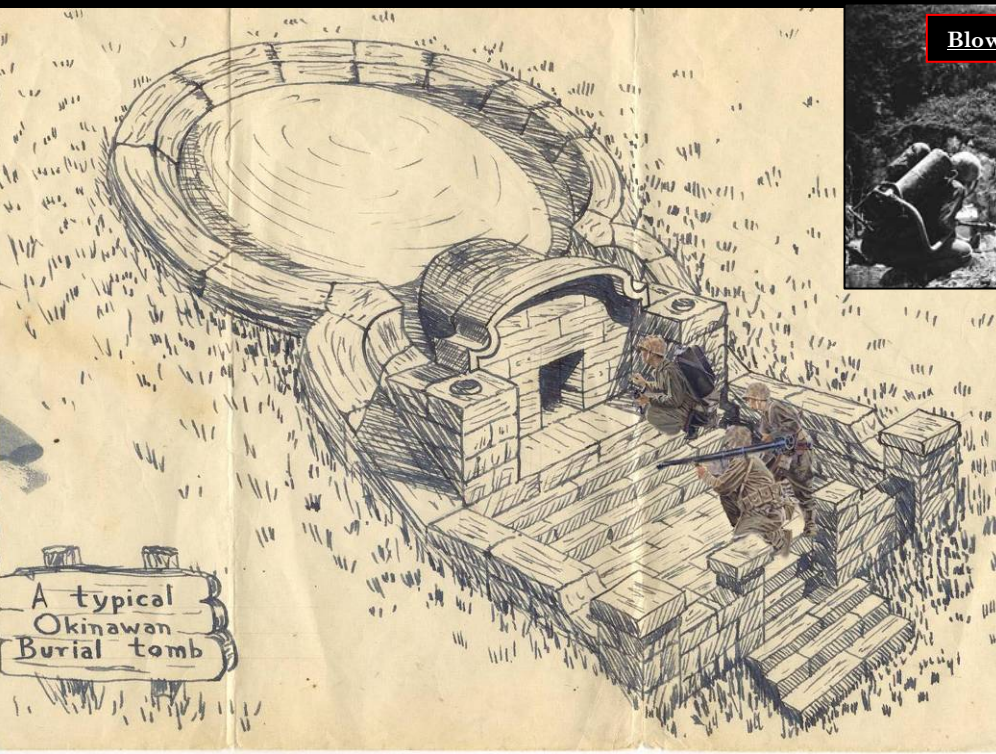
Artwork depicting US Marines neutralizing a turtleback burial tomb. From left to right, the Marines are carrying a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), a grenade rifle, a bazooka, and a flamethrower. The team operated as a special unit to disable the tomb from being used as a pillbox and to kill the Japanese soldiers firing from it. This is explained in greater detail in a following slide. The photo on right shows what the Grenade Rifle in the artwork looks like.



A typical
Okinawan
Burial tomb

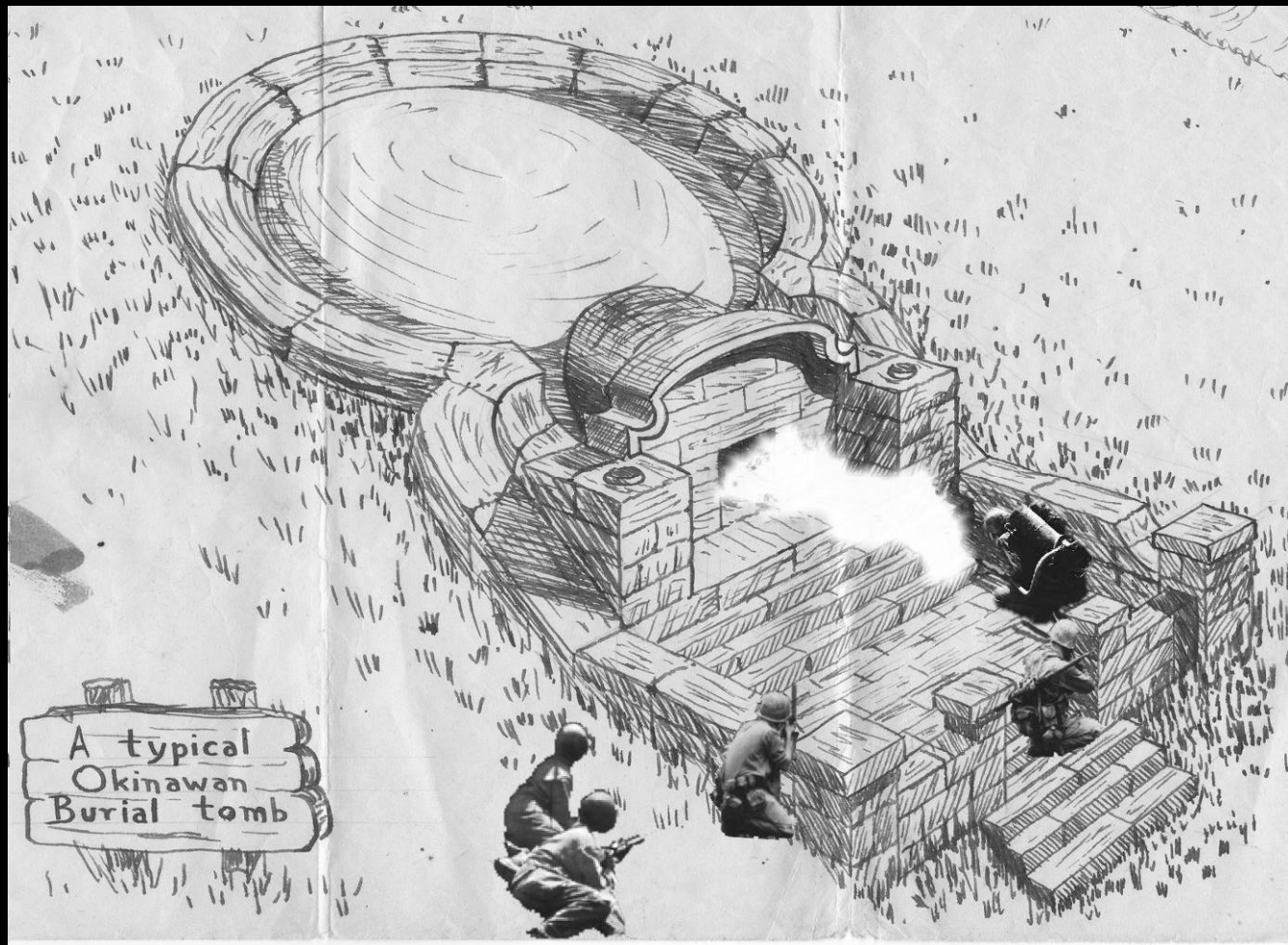
Neutralizing a tomb stronghold

The hillsides of Southern Okinawa were dotted with tens of thousands of lyre-shaped tombs unique to the Okinawan culture. Generations of ancestors were buried in the limestone and concrete tombs. When a relative died the tomb was opened and the body interned in a front chamber to decompose. The bones were later cleaned and placed in ceramic urns in the tombs main room. Families would have celebrations within the small wall-enclosed lawn or porch fronting the tomb interior to honor their ancestors. The Japanese frequently converted the tombs to pillboxes by smashing in the small sealed entrance and emplacing a machine gun. The machine gun was supported by riflemen, and although the position lacked all-round fire, the flanks were protected by fire from other tombs and dug-in covering positions. There was, of course, no escape and they themselves became tombs for Japanese soldiers as well. Thousands were destroyed along the remains of generations of native ancestors. Many were blasted with artillery and tank fire on the suspicion that they might be harboring Japanese defenders. The desecration of the tombs was a terrible affront to the Okinawans. The reduction of the tomb required special tactics. An entire platoon might be required to reduce a fortified tomb and the adjacent covering positions. Artillery and mortars first saturated the tomb and surrounding area to kill any enemy on the surface and drive those within the defenses away from firing positions. Under the cover of direct fire from tanks and self-propelled 105 mm howitzers the infantry would close in on the position's flanks staying out of the field of fire. Machine gun, BAR rifle, and grenade rifle fire was directed at the firing port to cover bazookas, flamethrower, and demolition teams closing in from the flanks. The Americans called this "blowtorch and corkscrew". (Howard Garrard)

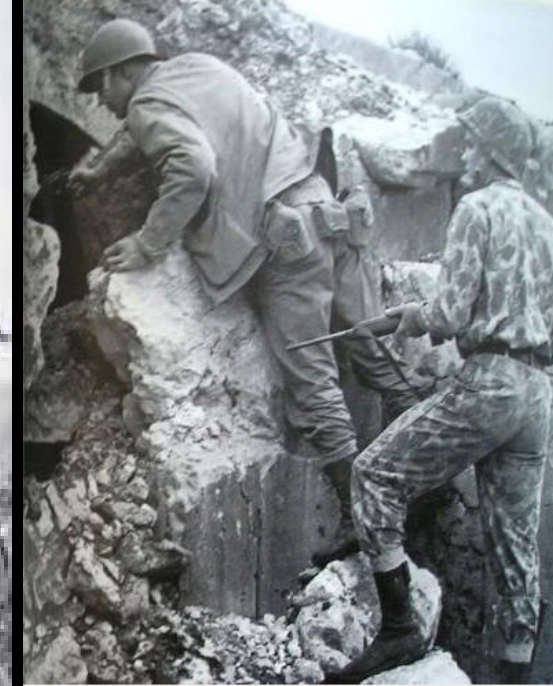


above: U.S. soldiers cautiously approaching tomb.

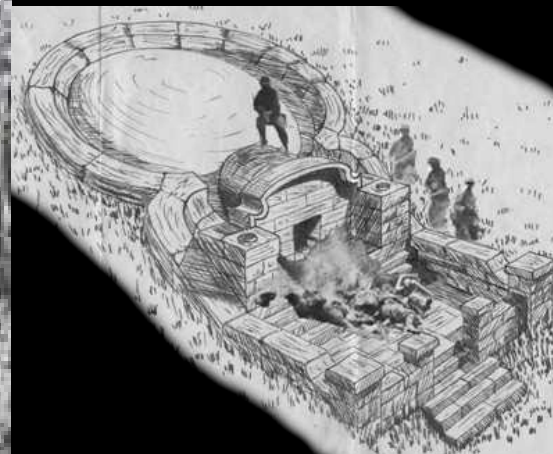
J. Potential positions: Burial vaults. Numerous limestone structures, of or similar to the type illustrated, exist on OKINAWA SHIMA. These have potentialities as strong points and may serve as mobile artillery positions, machine gun nests, pillboxes, or personnel shelters. (U.S. intelligence report prior to invasion of Okinawa)



The tactics of all out warfare in our modern day may seem shocking, but for veterans of Peleliu and Iwo Jima the flamethrower represented the most effective weapon for neutralizing snipers who insisted on fighting to the death. The flamethrower needed to be delivered at close range with exposed riflemen providing protective cover. The risk was high for the team given this task because any projectile that pierced the tank of the napalm mixture worn on the GI's back would be disastrous for all nearby.



Above: Marines entering a tomb looking for Japanese snipers or hideouts.



Above: American soldiers in the process of securing a tomb being used as a Japanese pillbox. It appears that the Japanese in front of the tomb entrance are dead and smoke is rising from the area.



“From the top of a hill we could see some sort of caves along the crest of the opposite hill.”

- Corporal Joseph P. Pizzimenti Okinawa 1945

When considering the propensity of the Japanese to use them for sniping, it becomes apparent just how grave the danger was from the thousands of caves and tombs that dotted the island of Okinawa. This photo alone reveals many caves entrances and several tombs. What may seem to have been a harsh military tactic of torching and demolishing these fortifications, becomes justified when reasonable minds consider the risk they presented to American forces – soldiers who neither asked for, nor started this war.

Okinawan tombs damaged by artillery and gunfire



US Marines entering a neutralized tomb after eradicating it's Japanese occupiers

Some Okinawa family tombs date back hundreds of years and are shaped like the backs of turtles. Inside are the bones of generations of ancestors.

“In the Ryukyus, the turtle-shaped grave, or kikkobaka, is said to be a shape of mother’s womb, from where everyone is born and from there everyone returns,” Nakama said.

In the traditional Okinawan burial style, the body of a dead person was kept in a coffin for a couple years until the remains became skeletal. Family members, mainly women, then would wash the bones in front of the grave before placing them in an urn. Nakama said the shimi is a festival to celebrate the New Year’s Day for the dead. On Okinawa, shimi now is observed during April, usually on a Sunday.



On Okinawa, families show respect for the dead with tradition

By [David Allen](#), Stars and Stripes
Scene, Sunday, April 15, 2006

From article dated April 15, 2006



David Allen / S&S

Gisho Nakama, the former curator of the Yomitan Folklore Museum, explains the importance of the annual shimi festivals, when Okinawans gather for picnics at their family tombs, leaving food, drink and burnt fake money for their ancestors' use during the coming year.

Shimi Season

During shimi season, the people gather at the tomb to offer food and drinks to their ancestors while they entertain themselves. It is all right to be merry and have fun because it is a time to celebrate a happy occasion for the ancestors. Many colorful foods are chosen to prepare the feast. It is a good occasion for members of the entire family to gather and confirm their kinship and ties. It is through this tie that everyone is reminded of a need to be a responsible member of the family and the society. Throughout April, Okinawan families gather at the distinctive tombs that contain the remains of their ancestors in a tradition that might seem strange to Americans. The occasions are less solemn than one would suppose. After a brief ceremony that includes prayers and the burning of paper “money” for the deceased to use during the coming year, children can be seen laughing and playing while the adults share food and drink. Shimi time on Okinawa is in April, and family members can be seen hard at work throughout the islands, cutting bushes, trimming trees and picking up trash around the tombs in preparation for the family gatherings.



On Okinawa, families show respect for the dead with tradition

By [David Allen](#), Stars and Stripes
Scene, Sunday, April 15, 2006

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Some Okinawan Christians, while accepting the teachings of Jesus Christ, still respect the beliefs and customs of their ancestors by tending to the tombs before the shimi festival in April each year.

The tradition of shimi still runs strong among Christians. On a recent Monday, Isao Tsuha was cleaning brush from his family's centuries-old tomb in the Nagahama district of Yomitan.

"Because I am a Christian, I do not join my family for shimi," he said. "But I feel a bit guilty about that, like it's disrespecting my ancestors. That's why I am here alone to take care of the grave. I think my family are having their shimi next Sunday."

David Allen / S&S

Isao Tsuha cleans brush from his family's centuries-old tomb on Okinawa in preparation for the annual shima festival, a time when families gather at the tombs of their ancestors for prayers, good food and a good time.



One last view of the interior and exterior of a turtleback tomb emphasizes the value they had to the Japanese that used them as military bunkers. American soldiers that entered them had different reasons for doing so, ranging from the legitimate, to the inconsiderate, to the immoral. Reasons for trespassing included eradicating Japanese snipers, gaining shelter from typhoons, curiosity, ignorance of Okinawan culture, and the greed of souvenir hunting which amounted to grave robbing. Dad entered the tombs on two occasions, once out of curiosity and another to escape the fury of Typhoon Ida in September of 1945 only after the storm destroyed the company's tents and left them without shelter of any kind. His limited souvenir hunting was restricted to searching the caves that held dead Japanese soldiers, not the tombs of deceased Okinawan family members. *(An excerpt from a coming letter is below.)*

“Most of us took off for the tombs to hide in. The tombs being about 3 to 4 feet thick, we thought it would be a safe place to stay to keep from being blown away.....We didn't stay in the (tomb) for long because we figured we'd take our chance on being blown away rather than smell the aroma of the tombs. We stayed close together, next to the entrance of the tomb. This broke the wind a little bit but the rain would not follow suit.”
-Corporal Joseph P. Pizzimenti (Okinawa, September 1945)

The vase (or urn) above is broken, exposing the human bones contained inside. These would be the remains of one of the family members entombed there. (Dad wrote about this custom in this letter)



Some Americans may be surprised to see the sign of the cross etched into the side of some tombs. There are two reasons for the Christian symbol. First, Okinawa has the highest percentage of Christians in Japan — 10 percent of the population. Secondly, crosses were drawn on older tombs to warn foreigners that the tombs were, in fact, grave sites. **“Soon after the World War II, many Okinawan graves were robbed,” Nakama said. “The cross was a sign to let foreigners know it is a grave and a sacred site.”**