

## Testimony to the War's Tragic End

The American invasion of Japan began with the landings on the Kerama Islands on March 26, 1945. This war memorial located on the Sondo Aharen Road near the entrance to the Teruyama Enchi Nature Trail dates from 1979. It features a long and heart-breaking inscription written by the Japanese Catholic writer Sono Ayako, which is reproduced in its entirety below.

### Sensekihi Inscription

Recorded here is the story of the savage battle fought on this island and the islanders' deaths in 1945.

From March 23 in the final year of the Great East Asian War, Tokashiki Island suffered unrelenting raids from American airplanes and naval bombardment from their task force vessels. The mountains burned and the island was enveloped in smoke. Unable to make night-time sorties with the plywood boats it had ready on the island, the Suicide Attack Boat Unit was ordered to scuttle them. Three hundred and fifteen fighting men from the 3rd Sea Raiding Squadron and from other units at the same base had to act as the island's garrison.

In a torrential downpour and hard pressed by the American offensive, the residents of the island gathered in groups at Onnagawara and a number of other places on March 27. On March 28, the following day, they elected to die by their own hand rather than fall into the hands of the enemy. With whole families sitting in a circle, they pulled the pins from hand grenades, or else the stronger fathers and sons took the lives of their weaker mothers and daughters. They were motivated by love. On and around that day, 394 residents of the island lost their lives.

Thereafter, the survivors were assailed by terrible hunger. People ate lizards, mice and the trunks of fern palms. As death approached, the lice which gathered in the seams of clothing would leave to be replaced by flies who came to lay their eggs in people's eyes as they struggled to keep breathing.

Of the three hundred and fifteen officers and men, eighteen died of hunger and fifty-two died as the result of the American assault. The army received the order to surrender on August 23, 1945.

On August 20, each of the units of the First Company forward position placed their weapons in a pile and made the parting address to their arms and the salute toward the Imperial Palace. The sun

shone, the sky was blue, the sea was blue, and several hundred enemy vessels were quietly sailing around or at anchor in the surrounding sea. And the war came to a numbing end.

(From the Staff Diary)

Ayako Sono

March 1979