

Okunoshima Poison Gas Museum

The Okunoshima Poison Gas Museum, established in 1988, has exhibits on the chemical weapons plants that were built on the island in 1929 and were in use until the end of World War II, in 1945.

The first room of this small museum focuses on the Imperial Japanese Army's secret program to develop chemical weapons on Okunoshima. Mustard gas and tear gas were produced in factories on the island. In addition, a type of incendiary bomb developed in Japan called a balloon bomb (*fugo*) was manufactured here. The *fugo* was designed as an inexpensive weapon that could ride on the jet stream over the Pacific Ocean to drop bombs on American cities.

The exhibits highlight the dangerous working conditions in the chemical weapons plants, and the effects of poison gas on the human body. The rubber suits, gas masks, gloves, and boots that the workers wore were not completely airtight, allowing poisonous material to seep in, which damaged the skin, eyes, and throat. Many of the workers suffered from exposure to the chemicals. Displays include equipment used to manufacture and store poison gas, as well as workers' documents such as notebooks and training manuals.

The second room is set up as a classroom, with posters and photographs showing how poison gas affects the human body, particularly the lungs, eyes, skin, and heart. Photographs from Iraq and Iran of victims of poison gas illustrate the horrors of chemical warfare in more recent times.

The island is dotted with war-related debris, including the south, central, and north artillery batteries, and shuttered factories. Before the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the island was fortified to protect the Seto Inland Sea. Three artillery batteries were constructed to monitor the enemy.

The North Battery Ruins are the remnants of one of the original batteries constructed on the island; 22 cannons were installed between 1897 and 1902. During World War II, the North Battery was used to store poison gas.

The Ammunition Storage Warehouse was also used to store poison gas during World War II, and to store ammunition for U.S. forces during the Korean War (1950–1953). The roof of the building was made of light material to limit damage in the case of an explosion.

The power station, now in ruins, provided power to the island during World War II and was used to store ammunition during the Korean War. Signs of its history are still evident in the words "MAG2" on one of the walls, indicating an area for storing ammunition magazines.

The Nagaura Poison Gas Storehouse was the largest poison gas storehouse on the island. Around 100 tons of poison gas was stored in each of its six rooms. It was originally painted in camouflage colors.

The Okunoshima Poison Gas Museum was built with the cooperation of groups representing the affected people and associated towns, cities, and Hiroshima Prefecture. The museum and people of Okunoshima hope that tourists will visit the museum along with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima City to learn about the importance of peace.