

# Boy Soldiers: The Secret War in Okinawa

A documentary by  
Chie Mikami and Hanayo Oya

沖縄スパイ戦史



## REVIEW LINK

[The Japan Times \(2018/07/18\)](#)

**‘Boy Soldiers: The Secret War in Okinawa’: Gripping stories told by Okinawans provide a firsthand account of war** — BY MARK SCHILLING

## SYNOPSIS

Okinawa, the chain of islands at the southernmost tip of Japan that are currently tattooed by US military bases. These islands became the bulwark to protect the Japanese mainland toward the end of World War II. After the Americans landed and a violent battle ensued, over 200,000 lives were lost, including many civilians.

While the bloody war depicted in films such as “Hacksaw Ridge” ensued on the surface, there was another secret war developing in its shadow that not even Japanese people are aware of. For over 70 years after the war, survivors have been afraid to share details of this brutal secret war which left deep scars that still have yet to heal.

Guerrilla units composed of 15 and 16-year-old soldiers known as the “Homeland Guard.” A forced civilian evacuation ordered by the Japanese army which resulted in a malaria epidemic that killed over 3,600 civilians. A military system enacted to control civilians which ended up encouraging them to mistrust and sometimes even kill innocent people. What sort of part did the young elite generals who had just graduated from the Japanese army’s enigmatic “Nakano school” play in this secret war? This documentary connects the dots in this hidden history in order to unveil horrifying truths.

This film uncovers Japan’s greatest taboos concerning the Battle of Okinawa, and also sounds alarms concerning the recent steps that the modern Japanese and American governments have taken toward remilitarizing Japan.



## DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHIES & FILMOGRAPHIES

### **Chie Mikami**



Chie Mikami is a journalist and documentary filmmaker. Entering Mainichi Broadcasting System as an announcer, she moved to Okinawa when Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting Corp was established in 1995. Concurrent with her duties as the main local news anchor, she has produced numerous documentary programs on topics such as Okinawan culture, nature, the Battle of Okinawa, and the issue of the U.S. military bases. Her programs have won numerous broadcasting awards. Her first documentary film “*The Targeted Village*” (2013) won both the Citizens' Prize and the Directors Guild of Japan Award at the 2013 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. Her second documentary film “*We Shall Overcome*” (2015) was invited to the Wide Angle Documentary Competition in Busan International Film Festival and Yamagata Documentary Film Festival's International

Competition. Her third documentary film “*The Targeted Island: A Shield Against Storms*” (2017) was selected Yamagata Documentary Film Festival's special invitation film. Besides being a filmmaker Mikami is a freelance journalist and an Okinawa folkloristics lecturer at Okinawa International University.

### **Hanayo Oya**



Hanayo Oya is a journalist and documentary filmmaker. She was born and grown up in Chiba prefecture, Japan, in 1987. Soon after graduation in 2012, she started working as a news reporter with Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting Corp, a local TV station in Okinawa, where she covered stories mainly about the issue of the U.S. military base in Okinawa, and of the Self-Defense Forces' deployment to Yaeyama Islands, as well as crimes and accidents caused by the U.S. military servicemen. She has received six awards with her documentaries and reports: The first documentary “*At the End of the Road –dialogue with a former Japanese soldier fought in the Battle of Okinawa–*” (2016) has received the Award for Excellence of the Progress Prize. The second documentary “*I was the Terrorist–The U.S. veterans stood up to stop the new U.S. military base construction in Okinawa–*”

(2016) has won the Highest Award of the Progress Prize and more. “*Boy Soldiers: The Secret War in Okinawa*” is the first documentary film that she has produced as a freelance journalist. Besides her career as journalist and documentary filmmaker, she acts as adjunct researcher at the Institute for Journalism at Waseda University, and educates future journalists.

## **DIRECTORS' STATEMENT**

We worked as colleagues at a local TV stations in Okinawa -Chie Mikami was an anchor, and Hanayo Oya was a news reporter-. Having done many interviews with survivors of the Battle of Okinawa, we realized that no matter what experience they had or where they were during the war, all of them have reached to one single conclusion: “Japanese military didn’t protect us.” So what exactly happened for them? What has the Japanese military done to their own citizens? Hearing the voices of the survivors and bringing hidden facts under light was a responsibility for us as journalists working for Okinawa. Therefore, we have decided to make this documentary film.

Mikami focused mainly on Okinawa island, while Oya covered in Yaeyama islands and the U.S. Finding out and interviewing the survivors was not easy. It’s been 73 years since the Battle had ended. Many of them were already gone. However, there were those who decided finally to speak out their experience in their last days, and allowed us to reveal the secret war that they got involved in: Boy soldiers, the Hateruma malaria epidemic, and the spy lists.

Although these three histories were virtually unknown even in Okinawa, we realized that they clearly indicate the fact that the Japanese military utilized citizens as if they were weapons, kept them under control, and took their lives if they had a possibility to become spies, only to protect the nation. At the same time, we had to face to the truth that civilians had played an important role in the secret war. The military strategy to utilize them in the war let them have tremendous fear each other, and kill each other to protect their own lives. The border among perpetrators and victims were ambiguous in the war.

“Current circumstances in Japan bring my memories back. I wonder the same tragedy would be repeated”, said almost all the survivors whom we have interviewed. Today, “protecting the nation from external threat” is the cliches that the Japanese government uses to justify a deployment of the Japanese Army, “Self-Defense Forces”, to Okinawa. Their missile units are now to be deployed on Ishigaki, Miyako, Okinawa, and Amami islands that are defined as keystones of national defense against China. Most of Japanese citizens believe that the deployment of the SDF along with the U.S. military to Okinawa is necessary to protect the nation. However, little did they know the history that only 73 years ago in Okinawa, citizens were manipulated and sacrificed their lives under the same theory.

We believe that earning a lesson from the Battle of Okinawa is an ultimate act that citizens could do to prevent another possible war. And through the film, we hope that those who wish to have strong arms and weapons to protect the nation question themselves.

## **CREDITS**

Director & Narrator: Chie Mikami 三上智恵, Hanayo Oya 大矢英代

Producer: Yoshiko Hashimoto 橋本佳子, Shigeki Kinoshita 木下繁貴

Assistant Director: Masato Higa 比嘉真人 Cinematographer: Mamoru Hirata 平田守

Editor: Keita Suzuo 鈴尾啓太 Music: Yuji Katsui 勝井祐二

Production: DOCUMENTARY JAPAN, TOFOO FILMS, Chie Mikami, Hanayo Oya ドキュメンタリージ  
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