

Festival imparts Okinawan culture on Bechtel Elementary

BY FRED ZIMMERMAN
Stars and Stripes

CAMP MCTUREOUS, Okinawa — More than 170 Okinawans spent the day sharing their culture with the students at Bechtel Elementary School during the school's 15th annual Ryukyu Festival, named after what Okinawa was called when it was a separate country.

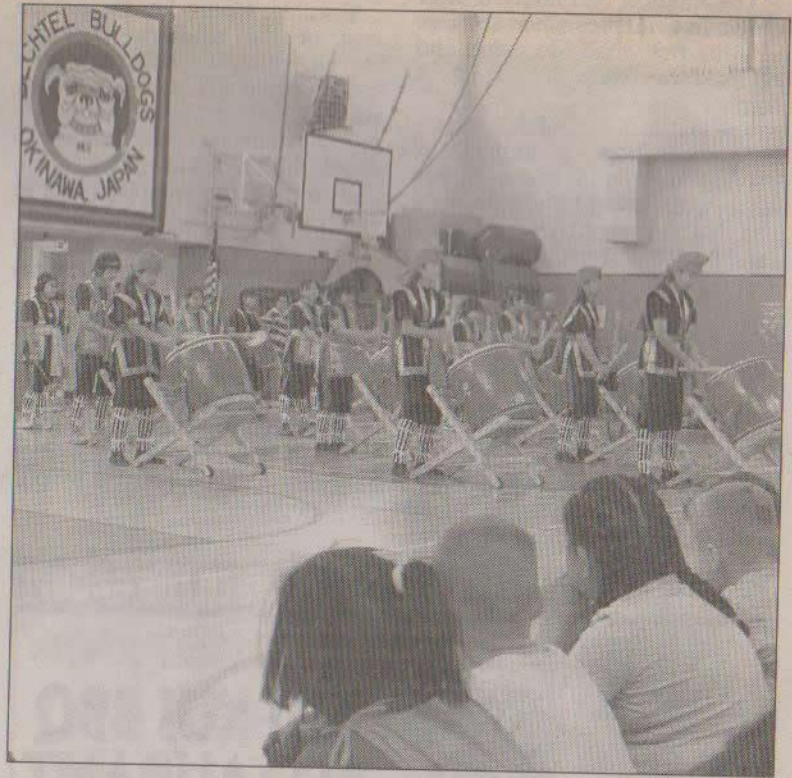
Wave after wave of students entered the gymnasium throughout the morning to catch one of two performances featuring the Mihoso Taiko Drummers, Tengan Himawari Kodomokai dancers — including a Lion Dance — and the Kadena Kokusai Matsuri Daiko Drummers. Barbara Lambert, the event organizer, said sumo wrestlers from Chubu Norin High School entertained the children in the afternoon.

Lambert said the festival is a great way for U.S. students to learn about where they are living.

"We believe in cultural diversity," Lambert said. "We want the students to learn about traditions, music and dancing" of Okinawa. "It's part of our job to show them."

The Lion Dance brought smiles to most faces as the Shishi Lion, played by two Okinawan boys, strutted around the floor, loudly snapping his jaws at unsuspecting students.

The last drum group performance had students stomping their feet: Jack Duffy led the Kadena Kokusai Matsuri Daiko Drummers into the gymnasium to the beat of Queen's "We Will Rock You." Students joined in by stomping their feet and clapping their hands to the beat.



The Mihoso Taiko Drummers perform Thursday for Bechtel Elementary students during the school's annual Ryukyu Festival.

"I liked it ... I thought it was interesting," said sixth-grader Chelsea Peeples, who moved to Okinawa in December and hadn't seen any of the performances before. "I really like the Shishi dog."

The Okinawan drummers said the students seemed to have a good time. Fuko Hanashiro said she liked seeing the U.S. students making the same movements as the drummers.

Lambert said the day was a success and couldn't have been done without full community support, both on- and off-base. She said

with the two communities working together, the U.S. students would have a greater understanding of how those in their host country live.

"They'll leave here appreciating what Okinawa has to offer," Lambert said.

When asked what the Japanese children got from the day, the girls laughed at Natsuki Sashida's response.

The Americans' "legs are all so long," she said.

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PHOTOS BY FRED ZIMMERMAN/Stars and Stripes

Jack Duffy leads other members of the Kadena Kokusai Matsuri Daiko Drummers in a performance Thursday for students at Okinawa's Bechtel Elementary School during the 15th annual Ryukyu Festival, named after what Okinawa was called when it was a separate country.