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U.S. Completes Gas Transfer

HIGASHIONNA, Okinawa (Kyodo) — Okinawan residents welcomed news Thursday that the U.S. forces had completed the transfer of about 13,000 tons of poison gas stored at Chibana Ammunition Depot.

The 7,645-ton U.S. Navy transport ship, MacGraw, is scheduled to leave Okinawa's Tengan Pier for Johnston Island in the mid-Pacific today with the last load of about 825 tons of gas weapons.

The final phase of the 58-day removal operation started at 7 a.m. when U.S. military trailers, loaded with 184.6 tons of nerve gas, made their way from the ammunition depot to the pier.

Residents along the 12.4 km. gas removal route had evacuated

voluntarily as usual for fear of an accident involving the gas.

The transfer ended by about 11 a.m., witnessed by Chobyo Yara, Chief Executive of the Ryukyu Government, Lt. Gen. James B. Lampert, U.S. High Commissioner for the Ryukyus, and Jiro Takase, Japanese ambassador to Okinawa.

According to the U.S. military authorities here, a total 13,243.7 tons of gas, consisting of 2,865 tons of mustard gas, 8,322.1 tons of nerve gas (GB) and 2,056.6 tons of lethal nerve gas (VX) has now been removed from Okinawa.

Officials of the Japanese, Ryukyu and U.S. governments are expected to inspect the Chibana Ammunition Depot today to confirm the total removal of the gas weapons.

The Japanese Government has decided to compensate economic loss suffered by the residents along the gas transfer route.

The U.S. military authorities refused to do so because they maintained there was no need for the residents to evacuate.

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Poison gas moved from Okinawa

From Michael Hornsby
Tengan Pier, Okinawa, Jan. 13

A load of some 150 tons of deadly mustard gas was brought here safely today by two heavily guarded American Army convoys and transferred to a naval cargo vessel for shipment to a remote American-owned island in the mid-Pacific. This completes the first stage of "Operation Red Hat", which involves the removal of 13,000 tons of toxic chemical weapons stored on Okinawa since the end of the Second World War.

This first shipment should have taken place on Monday. It was postponed until today because villagers living beside the road along which the gas was to pass threatened to disrupt the convoy by force after officials had failed to convince them that proper safety

measures had been taken.

Rallies and small demonstrations were held last night by left-wing students and other militant groups. Considerable tension prevailed when the first convoy set out at about 10 a.m. on the six-mile journey from the Chibana ammunition depot to the pier. In the event, only a small group of chanting students made an appearance at one point along the route and they were quickly hustled out of the way by the police. The second convoy followed without incident two hours later.

There was no real danger from the gas, which is of First World War type and contained in steel canisters designed to be fired from cannon. "You could drop these things from 50ft. and nothing would happen," one American

officer said. All the same, no one was allowed on the pier unless equipped with a gas mask.

The remaining chemical munitions contain a much more lethal nerve gas which has never been used in combat. No exact date has been set for their removal, though it is expected to take place about the middle of this year.

The original plan was to move all the toxic gas weapons to storage sites in the United States. This idea was dropped after much protest in America, and for a while the Pentagon had its eye on Alaska as a possible dumping place. Luis, too, proved unpopular.

Johnston Island was finally chosen. It is remote and uninhabited but still near enough to Honolulu to make the Hawaiians feel unhappy.