

## Warrant issued for sergeant accused of rape

OKINAWA CITY, Japan (AP) — A court issued an arrest warrant Monday against a U.S. Air Force sergeant suspected of raping an Okinawan woman against the side of a car in a trendy tourist area.

Japanese authorities moved with unusual swiftness for an arrest warrant against the suspect, identified by police as Timothy B. Woodland. Police said he denied involvement during questioning.

Only once before has a suspected American serviceman been turned over to Japanese custody before indictment. This would be the first time on Okinawa, home to the largest U.S. military base in Asia.

The island's governor, Keiichi Inamine, said authorities had sought a warrant — issued by a district court —

“to get the process moving as soon as possible.”

“This is a vicious crime that violates human rights, and is absolutely unforgivable,” Inamine said.

The attack has revived anger among Okinawa residents over the presence of some 26,000 U.S. troops on the southern Japanese island — though it has not raised the sort of mass protests sparked by the rape of a 12-year-old schoolgirl by three American servicemen six years ago.

It was not clear when Woodland — identified as a 24-year-old staff sergeant at Kadena Air Base — would be transferred to Okinawan custody. He has been questioned by Japanese police for four straight days, but was held in U.S. military custody. Police did not identify his hometown.

According to police, an Okinawan woman in her 20s was raped by Woodland at around 2 a.m. Friday after she had been drinking with friends in a nightclub at American Village, an area known for its bars and boutiques in the town of Chatan.

Police said she was forced against the side of a car in a parking lot and raped. Several other Americans were at the scene, but were not suspected of any wrongdoing and may have tried to stop the rape.

“We are seeing this as a single-suspect crime,” said Police Chief Koshin Iraha.

U.S. service personnel suspected of a crime are usually kept in U.S. military custody until charges are formally pressed against them. The only other time an American serviceman was handed over before his indictment was

in July 1996, when Terrence Swanson was arrested in Nagasaki prefecture on the mainland on suspicion of attempted murder of a woman. He later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 13 years in prison.

If charged, Woodland would likely be tried in a Japanese court and could face a maximum life sentence, though three to five years would be a more common sentence if he were convicted. Virtually all cases that go to court in Japan end with convictions.

Okinawans have long complained about crimes related to the heavy concentration of U.S. troops here, and the 1995 rape prompted tens of thousands to take to the streets demanding reductions in the U.S. presence. Reaction to the latest allegations has been more subdued.

“It's awful, but people don't overreact,” said Akemi Hashimoto who works at a women's clothing store in the American Village.

However, leaders in Chatan would seek a curfew for military personnel. And Japan's foreign ministry demanded Washington take boost discipline at U.S. bases. “The occurrence of such a crime is extremely regrettable. It should never happen,” Makiko Tanaka said.

Despite the sensitivities, Washington and Tokyo agree that the presence of U.S. troops on Okinawa is a factor in assuring regional security. Forces — including the largest contingent of Marines outside the United States — are within close proximity to China, North Korea, Russia and Southeast Asia.



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