



NAVY MEDICINE IN JAPAN

A Historical Review



Perry's Expedition to Japan

On May 26, 1853, before steaming into Edo Bay, Commodore Perry landed at Naha, Okinawa (then part of the Ryukyu Kingdom). Perry visited Okinawa five times during his expedition.

- **JULY 1853:** Commodore Matthew Perry entered Edo (Tokyo) Bay with four U.S. Navy steamships landing 250 Sailors and Marines to deliver a formal demand from the U.S. government to end Japanese isolationism.
- **FEBRUARY 1854:** Perry returned with eight ships and 1,600 Sailors and Marines to compel a response to the American proposal.
- **MARCH 31, 1854:** Passage of the Treaty of Kanagawa. This landmark agreement ended over 200 years of Japanese isolation (Sakoku), opening the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to U.S. trade, while ensuring the safety of shipwrecked American sailors and establishing a U.S. consul in Japan.
- **JULY 29, 1859.** Treaty of Amity and Commerce is signed opening up additional Japanese ports to U.S. trade.



Japanese woodblock print of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, ca. 1854

DYK.

18 U.S. Navy surgeons accompanied Perry on his expedition to Japan. Remarkably, this accounted for nearly 10 percent of the Navy Medical Department at the time (183).



May 16, 1872

U.S. Naval Hospital Yokohama, Japan opens. Located on a 100-foot bluff overlooking the city proper, the hospital's primary mission was to provide medical support to personnel attached to the Asiatic Squadron/Fleet. During its existence, its personnel treated severe cholera and influenza outbreaks, an influx of sick and injured from the Spanish-American War. The hospital was destroyed in 1923 by the Great Kanto earthquake and never rebuilt.

BSO-18 NAVY MEDICAL ACTIVITIES IN JAPAN



NMRTU Iwakuni

- Est. November 1954
- Subordinate command of NMRTC Yokosuka



NMRTU Atsugi

- Est. October 1950
- Subordinate command of NMRTC Yokosuka



NMRTU Sasebo

- Est. June 1946
- Subordinate command of NMRTC Yokosuka



NMRTC Okinawa

- Transferred to Navy in 1976
- Dedicated as a Navy facility in February 1977

NMRTC Yokosuka

- Est. August 1945
- Became naval hospital in June 1950



NAVY MEDICINE *FAST FACTS*



⛩ MILESTONES ⛩

- **May 15, 1868:** The USS Idaho arrives in Nagasaki, serving as a floating hospital and supply ship for the newly established Navy Asiatic Squadron.
- **May 16, 1872:** U.S. Naval Hospital Yokohama opens, providing shore-based care to the Asiatic Squadron. Hospital is destroyed in the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake and never rebuilt.
- **1895:** Navy Medicine investigates and manages a cholera outbreak in Japan.
- **December 1904-September 1905:** Surgeon William Braisted, USN, serves as a medical observer with the Japanese Navy during the Russo-Japanese War, gaining crucial insights into battlefield casualty management.
- **August 28, 1945-April 28, 1952:** During the Occupation of Japan, Navy Medicine establishes dispensaries / infirmaries in former Imperial Japanese Naval hospital buildings in Atsugi (1950), Sasebo (1946), and Yokosuka (1945).
- **August 30, 1950:** The U.S. Navy Dispensary Yokosuka is redesignated a U.S. Naval Hospital.
- **December 19, 1951:** Naval Hospital Yokosuka receives its first Navy Unit Commendation for treating 5,800+ Korean War casualties, including a massive influx of 2,022 patients within a 48-hour period (Dec. 6-7, 1950).
- **July 1, 1954:** The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force is established; U.S. Navy Medicine begins decades of close cooperation and training with Japanese counterparts.
- **January 11, 1957:** First Navy dental command in Japan (Navy Dental Clinic Yokosuka) is established.
- **April 1971:** III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF) deploys to Camp Courtney, Okinawa. III MAF was originally established in 1942 as I Marine Amphibious Corps (MAC) and later III MAC (1944) and III MAF (1965).
- **May 5, 1973:** USS Midway (CV 41) deploys to Yokosuka, establishing a permanent forward-deployed carrier presence requiring sustained afloat medical support.
- **February 28, 1977:** The Naval Regional Medical Center (later Naval Hospital) Okinawa is dedicated.
- **October 19, 1979:** Navy medical personnel respond to a devastating fire at Camp Fuji caused by Typhoon Tip, treating over 70 injured Marines in the worst peacetime tragedy in Marine Corps history.
- **February 5, 1988:** III MAF is redesignated III MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force).
- **August 1991 / August 1998:** USS Independence (CV 62) replaces Midway (1991) / USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) replaces Independence (1998).
- **April 2008:** USS George Washington (CVN 73) replaces Kitty Hawk, becoming the first forward-deployed nuclear-powered aircraft carrier in Japan.
- **March 12-May 4, 2011:** Operation Tomodachi. Following a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami, Navy medical personnel deploy immediately to provide humanitarian aid and radiological monitoring.
- **March 2013:** A new, state-of-the-art Naval Hospital Okinawa opens on Camp Foster, becoming the largest Navy-led hospital outside the continental United States (OCONUS).
- **2019-2020:** Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Commands / Units (NMRTCs / Us) are established.

COMMON TERMS AND THEIR JAPANESE ORIGINS

EMOJI

Invented in the late-1990s by a Japanese computer programmer, emoji are pictographs used to express meaning without words. The term directly translates to “picture” (e) + “character” (moji), functioning as modern-day hieroglyphics.

HONCHO

Originates from the Japanese “hancho” meaning “squad leader” (formed by “han” - squad, and “cho” - chief). While popularized by US personnel postwar, the phrase “head honcho” is actually redundant.

HUNKY-DORY

Believed to originate from Honki-dori, a street in Yokohama popular with American sailors in the 1800s. The phrase evolved to mean that everything is fine or satisfactory.

SKOSH

Derived from the Japanese “sukoshi,” meaning “a little” or “a small amount.” American service members adopted the term during the post-WWII occupation of Japan.

TYCOON

Taken from the Japanese “taikun” meaning “great lord or prince.” Originally used by Japanese officials to describe the Shogun to Commodore Matthew Perry in the 1850s to emphasize his power, the term was adopted to describe a powerful business leader.

