

## Ines Magalhães Gonçalves, East Timorese survivor

Interviewed by: Akihisa Matsuno

*Background information provided by Akihisa Matsuno:*

*Timor-Leste was a Portuguese colony with the population of only half a million when Japan invaded it in February 1942. Portugal was a neutral country, but Japan claimed that her neutrality had been breached by the landing of the Australian and Dutch forces in December 1941. The Japanese military occupied the whole island for three and a half years in order to drive out the Australian force from there. Japan sent Portuguese residents to internment and forced Timorese to work for the Japanese. If they refused, they were severely punished or even executed. The Japanese military set up numerous comfort stations across the country and ordered traditional chiefs to collect young girls. They also brought Korean and Indonesian women to Timor as "comfort women". Officers often had their own girl in their respective residence. After the war, the survivors continued to suffer physically and psychologically. They were often hurt by inconsiderate remarks of others. Some could not marry or get a child. Others never told their experiences to their husband and family.*

About Ines Magalhaes Goncalves

Year of birth: unknown, probably around 1930

Year the Japanese came to her village: not exactly known, probably 1943

Duration at the comfort station: four months

Ines lives in the village of Lasaun in the mountainous area of Ermera where she was born. She was taken to the village of Oat, where she was forced to work during the day and to serve Japanese soldiers at night. The village chief of Lasaun, Domingos Soares, was a famous collaborator with the Japanese military in the area. After the war, the Portuguese colonial authorities punished Timorese collaborators, including Soares, by exiling them to the island of Atauro. Later he escaped to Indonesian Timor and died there in 2003. Ines married after the war and got children. She never told her story to her husband. The memory of her first baby who was taken away by the Japanese soldiers continues to haunt her until today. Below is a summary of her story.

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Before the war I lived with my parents growing corn and cassava. I also wove Timorese traditional textile called *tais* as I learned how to weave it from my mother.

When the Japanese troops came here, our village chief captured me. Later I heard that the village chief was exiled to Atauro after the war. I was taken to the village of Oat where I was forced to work to build a road. I also had to cut trees and the grass and carry them to the town of Bobonaro to build houses for Japanese troops. In Oat, I lived in a house with some others. We had to work during the day and at night we had to serve Japanese soldiers. I was still a child and did not have periods yet. Japanese soldiers took off my cloth and mounted on me. I had to serve about four soldiers at one night, sometimes eight. They treated me like an animal. I could not stand up and had great difficulty even in walking. I was lying on the bed like a dead person.

Women like us had no power. We couldn't do anything because we were afraid that we would be killed. We just surrendered. We were given no foods nor were allowed to go back home. Because I could not go back home for a long time, my mother brought me foods.

It was the village chief who managed the comfort station. Some women attempted to escape, but they mostly did not succeed. I even could not try to escape as I thought my parents would be killed if I did. The village chief knew me well. The women whose names were not known to the Japanese as they were captured on the road could probably escape. The Japanese soldiers did not know where their houses were.

I was at the comfort station in Oat for about four months. Then I got sick. So, I was allowed to go back home. I had pain in many parts of the body, especially around the sexual organ. I could not walk well because of the pain. I had pain in the lower abdomen, too. I felt as if I would die. I arrived at home, and my mother called a traditional healer. He scrubbed my body with herbs. My mother also bought medicine from a Chinese. I recovered with these treatments.

I don't remember the names of the Japanese soldiers who abused me because they came one after another. Also, I cannot read. I became pregnant one day, and I gave a birth to a girl at the comfort station. I named her *Kaibuti*. When three months passed, the Japanese troops had to leave. I wanted to bring my baby back home. But they assaulted me on the way and took my baby away. I don't know what has become of her.

I was sad. I also continued to feel shameful. I want the Japanese government to apologize.