

## Marta Abu Bere, 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 Marta Abu Bere:

Year of birth: unknown, probably around 1930

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

Duration at the comfort station: probably six months

Marta was born in the village of Raihun, Bobonaro. She was taken to a comfort station in the hot spring resort of Marobo surrounded by mountains. As a common pattern in the area, she was forced to work for the construction of roads and barracks during the day and at night she had to receive Japanese soldiers at the comfort station in Marobo. Domingos "Atsabe" is Domingos Soares who took Ines Magalhães Gonçalves to a comfort station. After the war, she married and got children. When she married, she told her husband about her experiences during the war. Marta was one of the two Timorese eyewitnesses at the Women's International War Crime Tribunal in December 2000. At the Tribunal she said, "I have not come to Japan for sightseeing. I have come to tell the truth!" She died at home on April 29, 2007. Below is a summary of her story.

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When I was in the village of Oat, two community leaders with the names of Resi Bere and Mau Leto came to me and took me to the hot spring of Marobo. There I was confined in a stone house on the hill. Domingos "Atsabe" took me to the comfort station. I was put onto the bed. I was still small and had no period yet. I became very sick, and I thought why Japanese soldiers did such a thing. We were like animals or water buffalos. I was forced to receive about ten soldiers at one night. They brought women from Bobonaro, Malilait, Hauba, Obulo, Marobo, Nunutana and Maganutu. Nobody dared to escape as we thought they would cut our throat if we did. After some months I became very ill and even could not walk. Then, my father asked the Japanese military to return me to home.

I had to work during the day cutting trees and the grass, carrying them to the town of Bobonaro. At night I was forced to receive soldiers. The soldiers did not pay. We were even not given foods. My elder brother brought me foods from home.

I was indeed a little girl. So, I was really afraid. The Japanese soldiers shouted, “Male and female coolies, work! Come quickly! Sit here!” I got so tired. I felt like I was a horse or a water buffalo. Human beings have dignity, different from animals. But Japanese soldiers mounted on me like a horse or other animal. I had to do it after I got exhausted of work during the day. Talking like this, I become filled with anger at it.

Men are born from women. Why can they behave brutally against women like that? We had to work under the hot sun during the day. We were completely exhausted, and we didn't feel well at night. They forced us women in such a condition to receive soldiers. Women get tired just like men get tired. Women also get sick just like men get sick. If men have dignity, women have it, too. When men are born, they don't fall down from the heaven. Both men and women are born from the womb.

At Marobo I share the same room with Soseloe, Boilao, Laurinda, Sosemau and other girls. They went back home after the war, and they all died. We received soldiers in the same room. We didn't see each other at the time.