

Japanese Prisoner of War Interrogation Report No. 49: Korean Comfort Women

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Original Annotation Link: <http://www.kyeol.kr/node/196>

Image Link: <https://archives.seoul.go.kr/item/82>

This document is an interrogation report produced by the Psychological Warfare Division, Office of War Information (OWI). It is one of the two important documents produced by the Allied Forces regarding the “comfort women” issue, along with the ATIS no. 120 report. This report provides a summary of the interrogations of twenty former Korean “comfort women” who were captured as POWs in Myitkyina area, northern Burma (today’s Myanmar). The case reported in the document is rare in the sense that it was the only case where as many as twenty “comfort women” were captured at once and their information was included in a single interrogation report.

The report no. 49 consists of the following information: Preface, Recruiting, Personality, Living and working conditions, Price system, Schedules, Pay and living conditions, Reactions toward the Japanese troops, Reactions of Japanese soldiers, Reactions to Japanese soldiers, Soldiers’ reactions, Reaction to the military situation, Retreat and capture, Propaganda, and Requests. Attached in an appendix are a list of the names of the twenty Korean “comfort women,” and names of the owner couple. The seven pages in total include a six-page body text of and a one-page appendix.

This document provides valuable information regarding “comfort station” management and living conditions of “comfort women.” Specifically, it gives detailed information such as comfort stations’ business hours, price rates, and income of “comfort women.” It is worth noting though that the document contains subjective interpretations about the status of the “comfort women.” For example, the interrogator who authored the report states that the “comfort women” were not pretty by Japanese and Caucasian standards, and that the women were “childish and selfish” from his view. Also, he adds that “comfort women” lived a relatively abundant life, even a life of “near-luxury” compared to those who lived in other areas of Burma. These descriptions have been favored by the groups and the individuals who were hostile to the claims of the former “comfort women,” and thus have been frequently quoted by Japanese historical revisionists and extreme right-wing forces to undermine the basis of the “comfort women” issue.

To fully understand the report no. 49, it is necessary to analyze its historical context as well as interrogator. The report is not a transcript of the testimonies of the twenty Korean “comfort women,” but a separately produced report based on the personal interpretation of the author who put together the interrogation reports of the women. The author of this report is Alex Yorichi. Yorichi was Nisei, the second-generation Japanese Americans. The mass internment of Japanese Americans during the wartime pushed many Nisei to join the US military and participate in the war in order to prove their loyalty to the United States.

It was also the case for Alex Yorichi. Many Nisei including Yorichi were put in a difficult situation in terms of their identity. The war was fought between their ancestral land and the country of which they were citizens. Against this backdrop, many Nisei participated in the war against their ancestral land while their families of Japanese descent (including American citizens) were forced into internment camps. This complicated situation would have influenced

the Nisei interrogators' identity in the first place. Put shortly, it is likely that Yorichi faced the double identity issue, that is, troubled identities between Japan and America.

Another point to be noted is that the report may not reflect the real voices of the Korean "comfort women" due to language barrier. While Yorichi barely spoke Korean, the "comfort women" were likely to have poor Japanese language skills. Considering this, it is inferred that the interrogations of the Korean women had to be conducted through an interpreter. It appears that the former "comfort station" owners, Mr. and Mrs. Kitamura who were called "mama-san" and "papa-san" by the comfort women played a role of interpreter as well as a spokesperson for the "comfort women." If this was the case, it is highly likely that the owners relayed testimonies favorable to themselves.

Possible biases underlying this report become apparent when it is compared to the SEATIC bulletin no. 2. The case of the twenty Korean "comfort women" at Myitkyina was reported in various records, as it was an important case revealing the reality of the "comfort station" system for the Japanese military. Unlike the report produced by Yorichi, the SEATIC bulletin no. 2 presents dry facts about the case.