

## Korean “comfort women” in South Pacific Truk Island 5

Annotation Source: Seoul Metropolitan Archive

Annotation and Image Link: <https://archives.seoul.go.kr/item/123>

This is a picture of a Korean “comfort women” attached to the operation report of the occupation forces in the Truk island and the central region of the Carolinas, which was handling the situation in the Truk island from January 1, 1946 to January 31, 1946. The Truk Island or the Truk Island of the Namyang Islands, as it was called during the Japanese occupation, refer to the islands in the central Pacific region and its current name is Chuuk Islands. It is one of the four states that make up the Commonwealth of Micronesia, which also forms the Caroline Islands with Palau.

After World War I, Japan effectively controlled the Caroline Islands through mandatory rule. In 1936, Japan established a state-run company called the “Namyang Colonization (Co.) Truk Business Center” in the Truk Island for the purpose of developing resources in the Pacific region. In the 1940s, military facilities were set up in the Truk Island to make it the center of defense in the Pacific region. Because of this reason, both the number of civilians forcibly mobilized for farm operations and military base constructions, as well as the number of Japanese Navy and the civilians attached to the military increased. However, in February 1944, a massive U.S. air strike destroyed Japanese Navy vessels and the air force, leaving the control of the sea in the area to the U.S. military. After the end of WWII, the U.S. military that occupied the area formed a unit responsible for the Japanese military’s war crimes and the evacuation and return of the soldiers and civilians, which carried out the task of sending those in the Truk Island home.

According to this report, in January 1946, a total of 14,298 people returned home from the island of Truk Dublon. Among them, the number of Japanese was the highest with 10,795, followed by Koreans with 3,483. In addition, 11 Okinawans and 9 Taiwanese returned to their home country from Truk island in January 1946. Among the 3,483 Koreans, 190 were soldiers, 3,049 were laborers, and 244 were civilians. There is also a record in the report showing that the boat IKINO, in which 26 Korean women who are believed to have been “comfort women” and a child were on board, departed Dublon, Truk on January 17, 1946, carrying 368 passengers.

Pictures of these women are attached at the end of the report (pp. 6-11). Of the 10 pictures, 5 were of Korean women, and the women in the photos are believed to be Korean “comfort women” because in the annotation of this photo, it says, “Search on the Korean women who are preparing for the evacuation. The 28 Korean women and a girl on the Truk island are being evacuated to Korea,” and the woman in the middle of the photo in a dress who is organizing the stuff in the luggage is Bok-sun Lee, a former “comfort woman.” Bok-sun Lee’s name is also confirmed on the passenger list of the 26 Korean women and a child aboard the boat IKINO. The IKINO, which departed the island of Dublon, Truk, entered the port of Uraga in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan. Afterwards, Bok-sun Lee went to nearby Tokyo and returned to Korea on a ship bound to Busan from Hakada Port in Fukuoka Prefecture.

Contributors:

[Organization] Chin-sung Chung Research Team, Seoul National University, 2015~

[Organization] Women and Family Policy Affairs Office, City of Seoul, 2011~

[Organization] National Archives and Records Administration, 1934~