

## Korean “comfort women” in Okinawa Temporary Camp 8

Annotation Source: Seoul Metropolitan Archive

Annotation and Image Link: <https://archives.seoul.go.kr/item/119>

Okinawa Prefecture, commonly referred to as Okinawa, is located in the southwestern tip of Japan and is made up of over 100 islands, including the main island of Okinawa, which is home to the largest population. It was in March 1944 when major Japanese forces began to be stationed in Okinawa. In February 1944, when U.S. troops attacked Truk Island in Micronesia and Guam, Saipan, and Tinian in the Mariana Islands, feeling pressured, the Japanese military created the Okinawan Defensive Forces, the 32nd Army, to defend the southwestern side of the Japanese mainland. Accordingly, in 1944, at the end of the war, more than 100,000 Japanese troops gathered in Okinawa from Manchuria and mainland Japan. Since soldiers who had already used “comfort stations” in China moved to Okinawa, the Japanese military decided that they needed “comfort women” for the soldiers, and started to mobilize “comfort women” by creating “comfort stations” in various locations in Okinawa. As a result, more than 100 “comfort stations” were built in Okinawa from 1944 until the end of the war in 1945.

The Kerama Islands (Tokashiki Island, Zamami Island, Aka Island) on the west side of the main island of Okinawa were no exception. According to Bong-gi Bae, who served as a “comfort woman” in the Japanese military in Tokashiki Island, arrived in Okinawa on a Japanese military transport ship from Kagoshima, Japan with 51 women in November 1944. Among them, seven women were assigned to Tokashiki Island, Zamami Island, and Akashi Island, respectively. The next year on March 22, 1945, the U.S. forces began attacking Okinawa, starting with the Kerama Islands, and made their way into the main island of Okinawa on April 1, 1945 from Yomitan, the central Okinawa, and occupied the northern and southern regions.

It is unknown how many more “comfort women” were in Kerama Islands besides the women who were deployed in November 1944, and how many of them would have survived the Battle of Okinawa. However, considering the result of the survey conducted by the Okinawa Women's History Research Group, which reported in 1992 that there were 121 “comfort stations” all over Okinawa, based on the testimonies of the residents who lived in the same community with the “comfort women,” we may surmise that there were a large number of Korean “comfort women” in Okinawa.

This photograph shows 6 Korean “comfort women” who were detained in a temporary camp in Zamami Island, Okinawa. It was taken on May 18, 1945 by a U.S. Navy soldier, whose identity is unknown. There is a description of the photo that says, “Natives of Zamami Island in the Ryukyu Islands,” but it is likely that the women in this photo are 6 Korean “comfort women” who were in the temporary camp in Zamami Island because some experts believe that they are the same women in the photo taken by Captain Sokerson of the U.S. Navy on April 21, 1945. Captain Sokerson referred to them as “Geisha Girls” and left a description in the picture that “Jap Koreans were found on Zamami Island in the Ryukyu Islands, and the Japanese soldiers brought them to the island.” This shows that the women in the photo were Korean “comfort women” who were mobilized by the Japanese military to Okinawa. However, no further information is available about these women, whether they returned safely to Korea, or what kind of life they lived afterward.

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~