

## Korean “comfort women” found in Okinawa 1

Annotation Source: Seoul Metropolitan Archive

Annotation and Image Link: <https://archives.seoul.go.kr/item/115>

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, towards the end of the war, more than 100,000 Japanese troops gathered 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.

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 is a photograph of 10 captured Korean “comfort women,” taken by the U.S. Marine Corps’ reconnaissance team. The photo was taken by Connolly, a member of the US Marine Corps. 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.

These women were found by a liberation patrol unit near a Japanese supply depot, shortly after the U.S. Marines engaged in a small battle with the Japanese troops. Most of the women are seen with their heads down except for the woman who is talking to an American soldier. It appears to be a commemorative photo to show a scene of interrogation, similar to the photo of Korean “comfort woman” taken in Myitkyina, Burma. The note on the back of the photo says that these 10 Korean women were “sold by extremely poor families,” which indicates that the photographer, Connolly, was aware of the contents of the interrogation of these Korean women. Some photo books published in Japan explain that the women in this photo were “tea shop girls”, and Korean “comfort women” who became “comfort women for the U.S. military” were “allowed to return to Korea after the war.” However, it is difficult to find the basis for such an interpretation from the photograph and the note added to it.

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