

“Comfort women” in Songshan, China

Annotation Source: Seoul Metropolitan Archive

Annotation and Image Link: <https://archives.seoul.go.kr/item/116>

This is a photograph of four “comfort women” captured by the Chinese forces in Songshan, Yunnan Province, China. It was taken by private Hatfield, a member of the U.S. Army’s 164 Telecommunications Photographic Corps on September 3, 1944. This photo became widely known when a North Korean “comfort woman” Young-sim Park who testified at the “Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery, Tokyo 2000” said that she is indeed the pregnant woman on the far right of the photo. Songshan was such an important strategic point where the Allied Forces collided with the Japanese forces that it was dubbed as “Gibraltar on Burma Road” because the Allied Forces had to cross Songshan and Salween River (Lugang) in order to support the Nationalist Army of Chiang Kai-shek in Chongqing.

In 1942, Japanese troops occupied Songshan, deployed a garrison (the Japanese army called it the Ramo garrison), built a “comfort station,” and brought 24 women, including Park Young-sim, there. In June 1944, Y forces (the combined forces of the U.S. and China) launched an attack on Songshan in Yunnan Province, a border between China and Burma, and Japanese occupied Tengchong in order to retake Burma Road, and captured Songshan on September 7 of the same year. In the process, the Japanese troops were annihilated, and 14 “comfort women” were also killed by shelling. Only 10 women who escaped the caves used as strongholds by the Japanese army or captured by the Allied Forces at the scene survived. Youngsim Park was one of the four women found by the Chinese army after escaping the stronghold.

This is a photograph of the 4 women and the Chinese soldiers. Private Hatfield, who took the photo, mistakenly believed and made a note of the women as “Jap Girls” on the back of the photo because they were with the Japanese troops. According to the report in 《Round up》, a U.S. military newspaper for the China-Burma-India Theaters (CBI), operation diary of Y forces (U.S. – China coalition) that occupied Songshan and Tengchong, the interrogation reports of POWs, and the surviving video footage of the Korean “comfort women,” and most of all, the testimony of the survivor Young-sim Park indicate that some of these women were Korean “comfort women.” The 4 women, including Young-sim Park, were held in Kunming camp for about 7 months along with the other women who had survived in Songshan and Tengchong areas, and returned to Korea through Chongqing with the help of the Allied Forces.

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