

## Li Yunfang (1931- ), Chinese survivor

Interviewed by: Guangjian Liu

*BACKGROUND: The Imperial Japanese army's aggression in China encountered tenacious resistance from Chinese forces. In late September and early October 1939, Japanese forces suffered a major defeat in Hunan Province. Chinese soldiers fought fiercely to stop the advance of the Japanese army and, from 1939 to 1944, engaged in four major battles to defend the provincial capital, Changsha. In order to control Hunan, the Imperial Japanese Army deployed ten divisions with about 250,000 to 280,000 soldiers to the battle in 1944.<sup>1</sup> Pingjiang County, the hometown of survivor Li Yunfang, was within the warzone and the Japanese bombardment of Pingjiang started in 1938. During the more than six years of fighting in the area, Japanese troops established a large number of comfort stations.*

### Testimony:

My name is Li Yunfang. I am from Pingjiang County, Hunan Province.

In the early winter of 1944 when we just saw the first frost on the ground, the Japanese army launched another “mop-up” operation at my hometown, Pingjiang. The Japanese troops arrested many local people. Some Chinese soldiers also became their captives and were made to be their porters.

I saw a lot of Japanese troops come to Pingjiang during that time. Some of them rode horses, but most walked with guns. The big-eared hats worn by the Japanese soldiers left me a deep impression.

When the Japanese army's “mop-up” action started, I fled to the mountains and hid myself together with other women from my village. The Japanese went up the mountains frequently to search for local people. As soon as we noticed them coming, we would immediately change our hiding place.

One night about a month later, the Japanese soldiers came to the mountains to search again. Seeing that, we began to move, carrying baggage on our back. The road is invisible in the darkness, so the leader of our group lit some incenses to light the road. Unfortunately, we ran into the Japanese troops, and we were all captured by the Japanese.

The Japanese troops tied up my hands and took me to a Japanese stronghold at Qingshui-Xiang, where I was locked alone. There were about 30 Japanese soldiers in this military stronghold, as well as a large number of Chinese civilians who were captured by the Japanese army to do coolies.

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen MacKinnon, “The Defense of the Central Yangtze,” in Peattie, Mark, Edward J. Drea, and Hans van de Ven, eds. *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 201-4; Tobe Ryôich, “The Japanese Eleventh Army in Central China, 1938-1941,” in Peattie et al., *Battle for China*, 217-18, 226-27; Wang Qisheng, “The Battle of Hunan and the Chinese Military's Response to Operation Ichigô,” in Peattie et al., *Battle for China*, 403-18.

The Japanese troops raped me at that stronghold. I dared not eat what the Japanese gave me and planned to go on a hunger strike. A few days later, two people who were captured by the Japanese from Liuyang County saw me. They sympathized with my situation and did not want to see me tortured by the Japanese. They told me to hide in the latrine and not to come out when the Japanese soldiers gathered at the whistle to depart. I did as they told me, and that was how I escaped.

I have never told others about this experience before, fearing that I would be sneered at by others. I was unable to find the two people who saved my life after the war ended. Years later, I passed the entrance examination and entered Hunan Teachers College. After graduation, I taught at Pingjiang No. 2 Middle School. I got married to a retired military man, but I couldn't have children because of what the Japanese troops did to me. My husband has now passed away, and currently I live alone.

*Recorded by Guangjian Liu in Chinese on January 12, 2020; translated by Peipei Qiu and Weijie Xia.*