

War and Sex: PART II: Excerpts follow from a 2007 Associated Press article titled: “Japan’s abhorrent practice of enslaving women to provide sex for its troops in World War II has a little-known sequel.”

After its surrender — with tacit approval from the U.S. occupation authorities — Japan set up a similar “comfort women” system for American GIs. An AP review of historical documents and records — some never before translated into English — shows American authorities permitted the official brothel system to operate despite internal reports that women were being coerced into prostitution. The Americans also had full knowledge by then of Japan’s atrocious treatment of women in countries across Asia that it conquered during the war.

The documents show the brothels were rushed into operation as American forces poured into Japan beginning in August 1945. The orders from the Ministry of the Interior came on Aug. 18, 1945, one day before a Japanese delegation flew to the Philippines to negotiate the terms of their country’s surrender and occupation.

The only suitable facility was a dormitory for single police officers, which was quickly converted into a brothel. Bedding from the navy was brought in, along with twenty comfort women. “As expected, after it opened it was elbow to elbow,” the history says.



A Yasu-ura House "comfort station" in Yokosuka, south of Tokyo. AP PHOTO

“The comfort women ... had some resistance to selling themselves to men who just yesterday were the enemy, and because of differences in language and race, there were a great deal of apprehensions at first. But they were paid highly, and they gradually came to accept their ‘work’ peacefully.”

Police officials and Tokyo businessmen established a network of brothels under the auspices of the Recreation and Amusement Association, which operated with government funds. On Aug. 28, 1945, an advance wave of occupation troops arrived in Atsugi, just south of Tokyo. By nightfall, the troops found the RAA's first brothel.

"I rushed there with two or three RAA executives, and was surprised to see 500 or 600 soldiers standing in line on the street," Seiichi Kaburagi, the chief of public relations for the RAA, wrote in a 1972 memoir. He said American MPs were barely able to keep the troops under control. Though arranged and supervised by the police and civilian government, the system mirrored the comfort stations established by the Japanese military abroad during the war.

Kaburagi wrote that occupation GIs paid upfront and were given tickets and condoms. The first RAA brothel, called Komachien —The Babe Garden — had 38 women but due to high demand that was quickly increased to 100. Each woman serviced from 15 to 60 clients a day. American historian John Dower, in his book "Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of WWII," says the charge for a short session with a prostitute was 15 yen, or about a dollar, roughly the cost of half a pack of cigarettes. Kaburagi said the sudden demand forced brothel operators to advertise for women who were not licensed prostitutes.

Natsue Takita, a 19-year-old Komachien worker whose relatives had been killed in the war, responded to an ad seeking an office worker. She was told the only positions available were for comfort women and was persuaded to accept the offer. According to Kaburagi's memoirs, published in Japanese after the occupation ended in 1952, Takita jumped in front of a train a few days after the brothel started operations.

"The worst victims ... were the women who, with no previous experience, answered the ads calling for 'Women of the New Japan,'" he wrote. By the end of 1945, about 350,000 U.S. troops were occupying Japan. At its peak, Kaburagi wrote, the RAA employed 70,000 prostitutes to serve them. Toshiyuki Tanaka, a history professor at the Hiroshima Peace Institute, cautioned that Kaburagi's number is hard to document. But he added the RAA was also only part of the picture — the number of private brothels outside the official system was likely even higher.

The U.S. occupation leadership provided the Japanese government with penicillin for comfort women servicing occupation troops, established prophylactic stations near the RAA brothels and, initially, condoned the troops' use of them, according to documents discovered by Tanaka.

Occupation leaders were not blind to the similarities between the comfort women procured by Japan for its own troops and those it recruited for the GIs. A Dec. 6, 1945, memorandum from Lt. Col. Hugh McDonald, a senior officer with the Public Health and Welfare Division of the occupation's General Headquarters, shows U.S. occupation forces were aware the Japanese comfort women were often coerced.

“The girl is impressed into contracting by the desperate financial straits of her parents and their urging, occasionally supplemented by her willingness to make such a sacrifice to help her family,” he wrote. “It is the belief of our informants, however, that in urban districts the practice of enslaving girls, while much less prevalent than in the past, still exists.”

Amid complaints from military chaplains and concerns that disclosure of the brothels would embarrass the occupation forces back in the U.S., on March 25, 1946, Gen. Douglas MacArthur placed all brothels, comfort stations and other places of prostitution off limits. The RAA soon collapsed.

In the 1960s, after the war with North Korea, the South Korean government was desperate to keep U.S. troops in South Korea and wanted women to serve as "patriots" and "civilian diplomats." But the job descriptions offered to women did not reflect the jobs at which the women “worked” through the 1960s and 1970s, but rather used the women as commodities, prostitutes, to boost a post-war economy. Afterwards, the women were neglected and forgotten, left to live out their lives in poverty, stigmatized for having worked as prostitutes.

Cho Myung-ja who ran away from home as a teen in the 1960s to escape a father who beat her, ended up in the red light district in a South Korean town that hosted a large U.S. Army garrison, and was sold by a pimp to one of the brothels allowed by the government to serve American soldiers.



Kim recalling her life as a prostitute serving U.S. military personnel stationed in South Korea, in Pyeongtaek (STAFF, Reuters / 7/11/14)By Ju-min Park Reuters

On June 25, 2014, sixty-four years to the day after the Korean War broke out, Cho joined 122 other surviving comfort women, as they also were called, in a lawsuit against their government. They claim the South Korean government worked with pimps to run a sex trade for U.S. troops, and violated these women's human rights. "It was a hard life and we got sick said Cho, 76, in an interview in her cluttered room in a shack outside Camp Humphreys, a busy U.S. military garrison in the town of Pyeongtaek, south of Seoul.

They say the government, at the time a heavy-handed military dictatorship, ran classes for them in etiquette and praised them for earning dollars when South Korea was poor. "They say we were patriots at the time, but now they couldn't care less," said another former prostitute [government employee], Kim Sook-ja, 70. "We didn't fight with guns or bayonets but we worked for the country and earned dollars." A U.S. Forces spokesman in Korea commented that: "Prostitution and human trafficking are cruel, demeaning and incompatible with our military core values."

In the spring of 1975, U.S. forces withdrew from the Vietnam War and Vietnam, leaving behind an estimated 50,000 children they fathered with Vietnamese women. In the following years, these Amerasians bore the brunt of Vietnamese hatred toward America. Today, thousands of half-American young, abandoned and now adult, children are stranded in a country that doesn't want them. Life was and is cruel for those offspring of impregnations by U.S. forces serving in the Vietnam War. View a 4 minute U.S. military video here: <http://www.military.com/video/operations-and-strategy/vietnam-war/children-of-dust/2297537951001/>

An excerpt follows from the keynote On Sexual Violence in Conflict, by Margot Wallström Special Representative to the Secretary General of the United Nations, 3 Nov 2010, Washington, D.C.

“Sexual violence in conflict is, I am often told, unavoidable. That it should be considered collateral damage [incidental]. ... All of this can certainly make rape and sexual violence seem unavoidable, as if it were something we would have to accept as part or consequence of any conflict. But we cannot and should not accept these false premises and empty assertions. Sexual violence in conflict is neither cultural nor sexual. It is criminal. No other human rights violation is routinely dismissed as inevitable.”

As it was in the beginning ...

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