

Japanese Crusader

By DAVID E. SANGER
Special to The New York Times

ABIKO CITY, Japan — From his modest house in this distant Tokyo suburb, Seiji Yoshida, now 78 years old and bent by age, has become something of a nightmare for the Japanese Government: a self-described former war criminal eager to confess in front of the television cameras.

Again and again in recent months Mr. Yoshida has told the story of how he led a group of wartime policemen into rural corners of Korea, surrounded entire villages, and seized women between the ages of 18 and 35. Often, he said, he grabbed screaming infants from the women's arms before forcing them into trucks and shipping them to the front lines in China to serve in brothels for Japan's invasion force. Thousands of the women never returned, some killed by Japanese soldiers.

Rarely has the intense as this yet weeks brings a flood of some event in the past.

"The Apology" Japan is silent. Hata, one of Mr. Hata's closest associates, said that the official obituary of the military had recruited the brothers, officials cling to the brothel system, vate entrepreneur.

Still, the Government of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa has been scrambling to find a way around a diplomatic minefield as elderly Korean women step forward after years of silence to demand reparations for their pain. Apart from their accounts, Mr. Yoshida's memories are the most potent bit of testimony yet that Japan not only ran the brothels but that it also organized kidnapping squads to supply the sites supplied with tens of thousands of women.

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Confessing to kidnapping 2,000 women in Korea.

diers and many others caught in the crossfire of battle.

"The screaming was terrible, but that was my routine throughout 1933 and 1944," Mr. Yoshida said recently, estimating that he had seized perhaps 2,000 women. "It was just like kidnapping. It was the worst abuse of human rights in Asia in this century."

Clashing Memories

For months the Government of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa has been scrambling to find a way around a diplomatic minefield as elderly Korean women step forward after years of silence to demand reparations for their pain. Apart from their accounts, Mr. Yoshida's memories are the most potent bit of testimony yet that Japan not only ran the brothels but that it also organized kidnapping squads to supply the sites supplied with tens of thousands of women.

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to admit she had been a comfort woman, after Kim Hak Sun went public because she "could not stand the Japanese government's lie," more than 100 others followed her example.

Kim and two other women also filed a suit against the Japanese government last December, on Pearl Harbor Day, and six more joined recently, including Sim Mi Ja, all of them asking ¥20 million each in compensation.

"We have put together a comfort women action network comprised of 16 groups in Japan," says Diet member Shimizu. "There is now a solidarity among the Korean women and Japanese women. The group action of both countries' women against injustice has awakened many people's consciences. Japan must sincerely apologize, or the future relationship between Korea and Japan will never be normalized."

Not facing the issue squarely

The government seems bent on avoiding facing the issue squarely. At the Diet Budget Committee meeting in March, in which Shimizu questioned officials, including Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, about what the government was doing, the official reply was that the investigation was continuing, but with no extra budget. As a result, when the six-month investigation was completed earlier this month by the Defense Agency, Health and Welfare Ministry, National Police Agency, Education Ministry and Labor Ministry, only 127 documents had been found.

"The Defense Agency was not cooperating," claims Kikue Takahashi, director of a Tokyo-based anti-prostitution group. "In January, she says, she and five other members of the group were able to find 127 comfort women documents in the archives of the Defense Agency library in only two hours of searching. Documents were signed by then-Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, Imperial Prime Minister Fumimaro Toyama and Prime Minister Shigemitsu Shigemura."

and Imperial Navy Minister Mitsumasa Kiuchi."

The government also refused to allow the testimony in the Diet of Seiji Yoshida, 78, a former military officer whose job,

she had Yoshida standing by until the day before in hopes of arranging for his testimony, "why aren't you letting Mr. Seiji Yoshida come in to testify? Show us that you want to know the facts!"



Diet member Sumiko Shimizu (standing) felt compelled to apologize on behalf of the Japanese people at a press conference held for former comfort women. YOSHIAKI MIURA PHOTO

he said, included ordering men to abduct Korean women by the truckful to serve as comfort women.

"If you say that you're truly investigating the matter," Shimizu challenged the government at the meeting, for which

After the investigation, Chief Cabinet Secretary Koichi Kato concluded that the government could find no evidence that women were either forced or deceived into serving the Japanese soldiers. The government remained firm in its stand

that all matters concerning the war and Japan's colonization of Korea were settled by the 1965 treaty in which Japan agreed to pay \$800 million in compensation to the Korean government.

Drawing a line somewhere

The comfort women system, Prime Minister Miyazawa said, "was the result of war, which should never have happened." Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe agreed. "War is cruel, unethical, and should not happen again, but compensation for every individual is impossible. You have to draw a line somewhere."

But Shimizu argues that the issue was not just war, rather that it was discrimination against women and against a different ethnic group.

Mizuho Fukushima, one of the lawyers representing the Koreans, says the comfort women issue is "a problem that still exists today in a different form. There's a parallel between comfort women and Asian women today who are deceived into coming to Japan to work as prostitutes against their will."

In February, a South Korean citizen group asked the United Nations Human Rights Commission to support its demands for an apology and compensation from Japan.

Concealed deeds of the past

Now, the Chinese and Taiwanese governments are also asking Japan to recognize and to compensate the former comfort women in each country.

And in June, the first hearing for the comfort women compensation took place in the Tokyo District Court.

The concealed deeds of the past are being exposed as women's voices, such as Hwang Kum Joo's, are at last raised and being heard: "I was afraid to reveal the past for 50 years, but now I realize I got only a short life left, and I will tell the whole world about you."

Japanese Crusader Presses Wartime-Brothel Issue

By DAVID E. SANGER
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ABIKO CITY, Japan — From his modest house in this distant Tokyo suburb, Seiji Yoshida, now 78 years old and bent by age, has become something of a nightmare for the Japanese Government: a self-described former war criminal eager to confess in front of the television cameras.

Again and again in recent months Mr. Yoshida has told the story of how he led a group of wartime policemen into rural corners of Korea, surrounded entire villages, and seized women between the ages of 18 and 35. Often, he said, he grabbed screaming infants from the women's arms before forcing the women into trucks and shipping them to the front lines in China to serve in brothels for Japan's invasion force.

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sands of "inanfu," or "comfort women."

Mr. Yoshida's story has come under intense attack from historians who describe it as the fictional musings of an old man seeking headlines. No other veterans have told similar stories, they point out, and there is no documentary evidence to back him up.

But the issue of his war experiences, like every argument here over the extent of Japan's war crimes, suggests that more than the facts is at stake. It is one of the constant small skirmishes here between those who say Japan has yet to come to terms with the war, and those who view disputes like this one as part of a campaign to humiliate Japan into a never-ending series of apologies.

Rarely has the struggle become as intense as this year, when every few weeks brings a fresh 50th anniversary of some event in the war.

'The Apologies Are Endless'

"Japan is silent about this, but Japanese are angry," said Prof. Ikuhiko Hata, one of Mr. Yoshida's leading critics. "The apologies are endless."

Confronted with overwhelming evidence gathered by a Japanese history professor who said he was tired of official obfuscation, the Government grudgingly admitted in July that the military had recruited the women and run the brothels. Until recently many officials clung to the explanation that the brothel system was set up by private entrepreneurs.

Hints of Reparations

Still, the Government insisted that there was no evidence the women were forced into the work. Instead, it suggested that the 100,000 to 200,000 women were volunteers, or young women sold to "brokers" by their families, or innocents who had been duped into believing they were going to work at factories. The Government has rejected proposals for public hearings on the issue, saying it would violate the privacy of the women.



David E. Sanger/The New York Times

Seiji Yoshida, who said he led a group of wartime policemen to kidnap women and ship them to the front lines in China to serve in brothels for the Japanese forces.

Others suggest the Government has a different motive: If the women could prove that the Government had a team of kidnappers at work, it might strengthen claims for compensation.

The South Korean Government says it has collected the names of 155 people who say they deserve compensation. Of that number, 74 are women who say they were forced to work in brothels; the remainder are their survivors.

Mr. Miyazawa, apparently eager to see the issue brought to rest, has said that Japan must find a way to "express our feelings of remorse" and has hinted that some form of compensation might be on the way.

Stories like Mr. Yoshida's keep the

issue on the front pages. Starting with a book he wrote in 1983, long before the issue became a major political dispute, Mr. Yoshida said that he had been hired in Yamaguchi prefecture, near the Japan Sea, to direct a group of Korean policemen in "recruiting" the women. At the time, Korea was still a Japanese colony.

Altered Details

"We would use 5 or 10 trucks, and sweep the villages, choosing two or three young women from each who would be suitable." He describes a number of instances in detail, including a sweep through a factory on Cheju Island, off the southern coast of Korea, where many women were seized at a button factory.

But Mr. Yoshida's story has some problems. He confesses to having changed some details of events he presented as "facts" to avoid bringing shame on men he worked with and their families. Seiji is a pen name he says he used to protect his own family.

Professor Hata and others dismiss the accounts as pure fabrication. "In Korea it was all through official arrangements or it was voluntary," he said. Professor Hata teaches at Tokai University, which once trained civil servants to administer Japan's colonies.

Mr. Hata has published a lengthy attack on Mr. Yoshida's book. In a recent interview at his home in Tokyo, he suggested that Mr. Yoshida had provided starkly different details of his life in an earlier memoir written in 1977. That book contains little mention of the "comfort women."

"All the mass communications groups have been cheated by Yoshida," Professor Hata said.

Memory Lapse or Shame?

Mr. Yoshida's critics cite South Korean newspaper interviews on Cheju Island, where townspeople say that they have no recollection of any "sweep" through the button factory. No one, however, can tell how meaningful such a lapse may be: Work in a brothel for Japanese soldiers has been considered so shameful in Korean society that most survivors say they dared not return to their hometowns or families. And the families often disowned their "inanfu" relatives.

Only recently have some of the women come forward, saying they are now too old to care about the embarrassment.

Roh Chung Cha, now 70 years old, has testified in Tokyo District Court that in March 1938, when she was 16, her mother dressed her like a boy and sent her on foot into the mountains to the distant home of an aunt in Chung Chong Province, on the west coast of what is now South Korea. When she was halfway there, she says, she was captured by seven Japanese military men who threw her into a trunk.

She was shipped to China with 38 other women, Ms. Roh said, and two days later she was No. 27 at a brothel. Some days she was required to have sex with 30 to 40 Japanese soldiers, interrupted at times to witness the beheading of Chinese soldiers, she said.

"I don't believe the story," said Mr. Hata, asserting that few soldiers were in Ms. Roh's part of Korea at that time. "And no one can say, 'I was a victim of Yoshida.'"

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Wartime 'comfort women' recount their experiences

By MANAKO IHAYA
STAFF WRITER

The ambulance arrived. Sim Mi Ja was carried away on a stretcher, pale, shaken and exhausted by too much anger and pain for her frail 69-year-old frame to bear. Other Korean women by Sim's side, sharing her agony, tried to console her as the troupe filed out of the meeting room in Tokyo's members' office building of The House of Councillors.

Sim had collapsed during a violently emotional moment at a news conference in which 27 women from Church of Korea Women's Union, including two former "comfort women," publicly asked Japan to recognize and apologize for the cruelties it inflicted on some 100,000 to 200,000 women from Korea — namely, the inhumanity of having been forced to serve as sex slaves for Japanese military men around the time of World War II. The emotions were contagious in the room where listeners often reflected the pain, sometimes with tears, of the two women as they recited their life stories.

But what set off Sim's hysteria was an inquiry by a Japanese reporter, a young man who with a poker face asked the women how much they sought to gain in compensation money.

"It is not money!" Sim snapped back in the Korean language. "We want our bodies and souls back!" She and the other former comfort woman present, Hwang Kum Joo, could not restrain their rage at the interrogator, who may well have reminded them of a Japanese soldier.

As the other Korean women tried to calm them and Sim collapsed into her chair, the turmoil seemed to symbolize the complicated issue of the comfort women — injustice inflicted by Japan on Korea, and by men on women — that had been exhumed after 50 years of burial in shame too painful for the women to want to remember, and which had been covered up by the men involved with revised history. But as women's movements in Asia are beginning to take shape and the former comfort women are nearing the ends of their lives, they are increasingly moved to seek justice.

Some have gone public by filing lawsuits against the Japanese government. Although Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa expressed his apologies to Korea verbally during his visit there last January, it was not enough to wash away the anger and shame suffered for more than half a century. Well over 100 women, most of them around 70 years of age, have broken the silence of their shame out of undying anger at the brutality of Japanese soldiers.

The irony of this is that the comfort women system was started, in part, to ease the anger of Asian people toward Japan around the year 1938. It was the year following the infamous Rape of Nanjing, in which Japanese soldiers killed and raped countless Chinese civilians. Because the pretext of the war was for Japan, an Asian nation, to save other Asian nations from being colonized by Western countries, such barbarous deeds had to cease.

Thus, the Japanese military tried to solve the problem by establishing military-run brothels to restrain their men from raping local women. It was also to protect the soldiers from contracting sexually transmitted diseases at the local



Hwang Kum Joo (center) at the highly charged news conference. YOSHIKI MIURA PHOTO

private brothels.

"The comfort women system was needed to maintain order," said Defense Agency Director of the Secretariat Naoki Murata during a Diet Budget Committee meeting in March. "It was to ease the anti-Japan feeling aroused by the Japanese soldiers' deeds. It was also for the soldiers' health maintenance."

But why then, even for the moment put-

ing aside the moral question of abducting and brutalizing sex slaves of any nationality, were most such women Korean, and not Japanese?

According to journalist Kako Senda's 1973 book, *Jugun Ianfu* (Military Comfort Women), gynecologist Tetsuo Aso, during the war a military doctor, was partly responsible for the decision to recruit Korean women. As the first doctor to examine comfort women while on duty in Shanghai, Aso noticed a high percentage



Former comfort woman Kim G. J. shows a scar made by a Japanese soldier's bayonet during World War II. FILE PHOTO

of Japanese prostitutes with venereal diseases among the group of more than 100. He felt that the few Korean women there, who were young and inexperienced, were better suited to serve the members of the "sacred Imperial Army."

In 1939, Aso turned in a nine-chapter report on his previous year's experience as a comfort women gynecologist. In it, he strongly opposed the employment of

vision. One day, she turned in an embittered map of Japan after being asked her homeroom teacher to produce such a piece. A few days later she was taken by the police and reprimanded for embittering morning glories around the map as opposed to cherry blossoms, the national flower of Japan. The policemen then raped her.

"I didn't want to give up my virginity to him, so I bit his ear," Sim says, hinging back her emotions. "Then he poked bamboo skewer under my fingernails, burned my left shoulder with a red iron, and I fainted."

Some days later, she found herself in Fukuoka, Japan, in a room partitioned off by curtains. There were other women who told Sim that in a few days she would realize what the place was. And she did the following Saturday. "I was still in pain, and Japanese soldiers wanted my body," Sim says. "I was so young. You imagine what I went through?"

For the next six years, she was forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers 20 to 30 times a day on weekdays and 40 to 50 times a day on weekends. She and other women suffered from venereal diseases, but were given salvarsan shots so that they could continue working.

Some of her friends with infected or paired sexual organs were murdered by shooting or with a sword thrust up in them.

Hwang Kum Joo, 72, the other comfort woman present at the news conference said she was 15 when she and other girls were sent off on a train to Manchuria where they were needed for factory work.

There, she said, she was treated much like Sim Mi Ja, and she too suffered from venereal diseases and swollen genitals. When she got pregnant, she was given shots that induced miscarriages.

"Once you were sick, they gathered you in a group, segregated you, treated you and when you were better, sent you back," said Hwang. "Some died, and some comfort women arrived. After a while, I had been hospitalized three times, but was gone. I think they were buried alive."

After the war, Hwang took two months to return from Manchuria on foot to Seoul, during which scattered groups of Japanese soldiers, having lost the war, repeatedly raped her. Sim remained in Japan eight more years, working 12 hours a day at a factory. Both women say they could neither marry nor bear children.

"Did you think you'd live in peace after you came back to Japan?" Hwang said, hoping that former soldiers might be forgiven. "Well, I thought so, too. But I couldn't go home the way I was. I'm now with no family. I could never marry. You hoped that we'd all died, but oh, we came here alive to witness the atrocities you committed."

It was the Korean women's anger that brought the almost-buried comfort women issue into the spotlight, according to SDPJ Upper House Diet member Sumi Shimizu. In 1990, when the Japanese government claimed that the "comfort stations" had been privately run and that the Japanese military had nothing to do with them, it caused an uproar in Korea, especially among the women who had been enslaved.

Although no woman in the conservative Korean society had ever stepped forward