

Japan Admits Army Forced Women Into War Brothels

By JAMES STERN GOLD

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TOKYO, Aug. 4 — After decades of denials, the Government acknowledged today that the Japanese military had forced Asian and European women to work in army brothels during World War II, and it offered its first full apology for those atrocities.

The announcement was significant, given Japan's long reluctance to acknowledge the scope of its wartime aggression. But it was also another step to respond to demands from Asian neighbors that Japan admit the brutalities committed by its troops.

Confronted with overwhelming evidence, Japan grudgingly admitted last year that its army had recruited women for brothels ranging from China to Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. But it insisted there was no evidence of coercion.

[The report was one of the last official acts of the Liberal Democratic Government, which resigned on Thursday after losing its parliamentary majority last month. The party had ruled for 38 years. Page 9.]

Virtual Slaves

Today the Government said it had concluded that the bitter claims of the women were true: many were forced to act as virtual slaves, providing sex for imperial soldiers.

The Government said it had interviewed some of the women involved and former Japanese soldiers and Government officials, who for decades had withheld their knowledge of the way force was used to supply the brothels.

The report concluded that many women lived as captives of the military beginning in 1932, when Japan invaded China, to the end of the war in 1945. Among the women forced to have sex with soldiers were Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Filipinos, as well as Dutch women captured in Indonesia, then a Dutch colony.

Historians have estimated that as many as 200,000 women were held captive. But the report said a total tabulation was impossible, adding only that "it is apparent that there existed a great number of 'comfort women,'" as the women are euphemistically called.

Few Personal Details

"In many cases private recruiters, asked by the comfort station operators who presented the request of the military authorities, conducted the recruitment of comfort women," it said.

"Pressed by the growing need for more comfort women stemming from the spread of the war, these recruiters resorted in many cases to coaxing and intimidating these women to be recruited against their will, and there were even cases where administrative personnel directly took part in the recruitment."

Yohei Kono, the chief cabinet secretary,

added in a statement, "We shall face squarely the historical facts as described above, instead of evading them, and take them to heart as lessons of history."

The report itself offered no accounts of individual suffering. The Government continued to hold to its longstanding formula that all rights to compensation were abandoned by the Asian nations when they normalized relations after the war.

For decades most of the women hid their shame, particularly in Korea, for fear they would be ostracized.

Once they started to step forward a few years ago, some sought compensation and have offered painful accounts of how Japanese soldiers swept into villages, forcing young women at gunpoint into waiting trucks.

South Korea, where most of the

An apology at last to thousands of abused women.

women were seized, expressed qualified approval for Tokyo's admission.

"We appreciate the fact that in its latest report, the Japanese Government now acknowledges that coercion was involved in the entire process of recruiting, transporting and managing 'comfort women,'" the South Korean Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "We also appreciate the fact that the Japanese offered an apology."

But the ministry said it expected Japan to "continue to pay attention to those questions, which have not been clarified even in this most recent document, and eventually resolve them."

Tried to Shift Blame

Japan first acknowledged two years ago that the brothels had existed, but it insisted they were operated by businessmen, not the Government. Then last year the Government acknowledged that the Japanese military itself was involved.

One of the most heatedly debated issues involving Japan's wartime history is how little of it is taught to young Japanese. The anger in Asia over Japan's unwillingness to face up to its past drew attention over the last decade after the Education Ministry began requiring that descriptions in textbooks of Japan's role as an aggressor be watered down. China and then other countries considered this a whitewash.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman, Sadaaki Numata, noted today that high school textbooks now mention the "comfort women."

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