

# A Little Known Dark Chapter of WWII: Japanese Army Had Female Sex Slaves

By [Omar Cherif](#)



A few days ago, I came across one of the horrors of wars that hasn't taken its fair share of publicity in history books. The topic is about "comfort women," who were women and girls forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army before, during – and after – World War II. My findings led me to the history of sexual slavery and how it was widespread around the world until not so long ago. This is the gruesome story of a countless number of women who were dehumanized and abandoned in the name of war, money, and power.

The name "comfort women" is a translation of the Japanese euphemism *ianfu* (慰安婦) and the similar Korean term *wianbu* (위안부). *Ianfu* is simply the less offensive term for *shōfu* (娼婦), which means "prostitute(s)." The sole 'job' of comfort women was to fulfill the sexual needs of Japanese military personnel and civil officers.

Many of those females were from occupied countries like Korea, China, and the Philippines. Although others from Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan (then a Japanese dependency), Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies), East Timor (then Portuguese Timor) were also interned. A smaller number from the Netherlands and Australia were involved as well.

Other Japanese-occupied territories were used for military "comfort stations," also known as "comfort houses." The stations were located in Japan, China, the Philippines,

Indonesia, then Malaya, Thailand, Burma, New Guinea, Hong Kong, Macau, and French Indochina.

In fact, the first comfort station, a brothel, was established in the Japanese concession in Shanghai in 1932, way before WW II. Earlier comfort women were Japanese prostitutes who had volunteered for such service. However, there was a shortage of volunteers as Japan continued its military expansion, so they turned to the locals. The number of stations increased rapidly after the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937.

According to testimony, those poor young women were abducted from their homes in countries under Imperial Japanese custody and were shipped to “comfort stations” around the world. Some were 13 year-old virgins, others were older. Even though a small number was willingly recruited, in most cases, the females were lured with promises of work in factories, restaurants, and military hospitals. Or, they were simply kidnapped. Once recruited, they were kept incarcerated in the stations in foreign lands where they “lived” as sex slaves.



Indonesian comfort women

Military correspondence of the Japanese Imperial Army shows that there was three main reasons why comfort stations were

initially established.

The essential purpose was the prevention of rape crimes committed by Japanese army personnel, and thus preventing the rise of hostility among people in occupied areas. You know, to pacify the soldiers by allowing them to discharge instead of going crazy and getting discharged.

By July 1937, Japan had already begun its full-scale war against China. The soldiers were raping Chinese women and this was damaging the honour of the Imperial Army. So the idea of their very own comfort women and stations was incepted on a large scale.

A second purpose for the existence of this system was to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. Servicemen who raped the Chinese women will eventually go back to Japan and the diseases will spread throughout the country and cause a large-scale social, as well as moral, issue.

A third reason was to prevent spies. The Japanese military leaders were afraid that military secrets would leak to local prostitutes if soldiers used brothels in occupied areas.

The sad part of this dark chapter in history is that approximately three quarters of comfort women died. Most of those who survived were left infertile due to trauma, abuse or sexually transmitted diseases. Other survivors, though very few, made their stories public many years later. And that's probably how we know so much.

The numbers and the dreadful details revealed were truly shocking.

According to a 1995 United Nations Commissions on Human Rights, many of the women were raped to the point of death. Some were killed by torture; such as having their breasts sliced off or having their abdomens slit open for refusing to be raped...or for no reason.

Each slave was reportedly raped an average of 10 rapes per day (considered by some to be a low estimate), for a five-day work week. This means that each comfort girl was raped about 50 times per week, or 2,500 times per year. So for three years of service – the average – each one would have been raped 7,500 times. It hurts to even think about it.

It's worth noting that Japan was not the only nation to be involved in sexual slavery in recent history. Germany and Korea, too, had their own versions of comfort stations.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 10111-MW-1019-07  
Foto: Dietrich | 1940

## German brothels in occupied France

For the Nazis, they were military brothels which were already set up by the Third Reich during WW II throughout much of occupied Europe for the use of Wehrmacht and SS soldiers. The idea was a relatively new creation for the Germans, so in the West they were sometimes set up using existing brothels. Until 1942, there were around 500 military brothels of this kind in

Nazi occupied Europe. Often operating in confiscated hotels and guarded by the Wehrmacht, these facilities served traveling soldiers and those withdrawn from the front.

In addition to the military brothels, the Nazis also operated concentration camp brothels (*Lagerbordell*). Those were established as a way to control inmates, create an incentive for prisoners to collaborate, and prevent riots and escapes. It is estimated that between the military and the concentration camps brothels, at least 34,140 European women were forced to serve as prostitutes during the German occupation.

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## About the Author:



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