

## 'If we don't face our past, we're bound to repeat the same mistakes.' Japanese wartime medical orderly reports on army's role in maintaining 'comfort women' system □やっぱりね、過去をちゃんと見てないものは、また同じことを始める」慰安所と日本軍の関わりについてある衛生兵が報告

David McNeill

**David McNeill introduction, Matsumoto Masayoshi testimony (Japanese and English transcript and video of testimony), translation by Miguel Quintana**

For years, Abe Shinzo, Japan's prime minister, has been playing with diplomatic fire over a sordid episode of wartime history that has been at the center of a storm of controversy involving Japan, China, Korea and other outposts of Japan's empire: the herding of thousands of women across Asia into Japanese military brothels. His decision this year to order an investigation into a landmark government apology to the so-called "comfort women" might have helped end the controversy. Instead, it has further ignited it, which may indeed have been Abe's intention - he has campaigned for nearly two decades to undermine the apology.

The 1993 Kono statement, compiled in consultation with South Korea by Japan's then chief cabinet secretary Kono Yohei, acknowledged the army's role in forcing the women into sexual slavery. Nationalists, championed by the *Yomiuri*, Japan's most popular newspaper, deny coercion and insist the women voluntarily provided "comfort" to frontline troops. They have repeatedly demanded the withdrawal of the so-called Kono statement, with potentially explosive diplomatic consequences.

In June, a government panel set up by Abe said

the facts used to draft the statement were accurate and there are no plans to change it. But the panel's report also revealed that the statement was the product of months of secret negotiations with South Korean diplomats. The diplomatic record reveals intense discussion on the level of "coerciveness" used to recruit the women, with Japan implying that some may have gone to brothels voluntarily. Predictably, perhaps, revisionists say that proves the statement was a political fudge, not an admission of official responsibility.

The campaign to rewrite the Kono statement has been given an added push by the decision of the *Asahi* newspaper in August to retract a series of articles it carried on the comfort women. The articles, written in the 1980s and '90s, some of which used a now discredited witness called Yoshida Seiji, were not true, said the newspaper. The editors had been "unable to see through" Yoshida's "fraudulent testimony" they admitted ruefully.

The humbling of Japan's liberal flagship has triggered a tsunami of abuse. The *Yomiuri* said the *Asahi's* coverage had helped fuel anti-Japan sentiment in South Korea, and became a basis of "misperception of Japan" throughout the world. Abe told the *Sankei* newspaper, which has led a two-decade campaign against the Kono Statement that "many people had suffered" because of the *Asahi's* reporting. Emboldened, ultra-nationalists have threatened to firebomb universities that employ ex-*Asahi*

journalists.

A boycott campaign, led by the Sankei, has taken a toll. Asahi's circulation is down by 770,000 since November 2013. A national "anti-Asahi Shimbun" committee, led by lawmaker Nakayama Nariaki, is seeking to press the advantage. Its inaugural conference in Tokyo this month (Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>) will discuss plans to widen the boycott and haul Asahi editors and journalists before the Diet. The committee's ultimate aim is clear: pressure the government to rewrite the Kono statement and in the words of cabinet minister Inada Tomomi, "restore Japan's honor."

Neonationalists such as Inada have ignored a string of well-documented reports making it clear that the Asahi's coverage of Yoshida had relatively little impact on the surge of interest in the comfort women issue in Japan and internationally, and in no way detracts from the extensive documentation of military and government involvement in the comfort women system. Many of those involved in the 2007 US House of Representatives Comfort Women resolution 121, for instance, including Dennis Halpin, a former senior Asia policy staffer, said in September that: "There was ample documentary and testimonial evidence from across the Indo-Pacific region to support the fact that Imperial Japan organized and managed a system of sexual slavery for its military..." The Yoshida memoir and Asahi's reporting of it were "not factors" in drafting the resolution, they added.

Nevertheless, several members of Abe's cabinet are gearing up for a demand that the statement be withdrawn next year, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II - and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the normalization of relations with South Korea, an action, if successful, that is certain to poison Japan's relations with South Korea, China and other Asian countries.

Abe, as a parliamentarian, long supported

nationalist think tanks that reject Japan's "apology diplomacy" for its wartime misdeeds. During his first term as prime minister in 2007, he got himself into hot water by saying there was "no proof" the comfort women were coerced by the military. But in March, 2014 he bowed to pressure by pledging not to revise the Kono statement.

Ironically, the statement was intended to end the controversy and reset the diplomatic compass. Instead, the dispute has festered and spread to the US, where a string of memorials to the comfort women, erected by Korean communities, has triggered Japanese diplomatic protests.

One way out of the impasse might be to shift the probe to the perpetrators. Matsumoto Masayoshi, a former medical orderly with the Japanese army, has spoken out this year about what he saw. Matsumoto, 92, says Korean women were used like public toilets, with soldiers lining up to rape them. He has offered to tell what happened to anyone who will listen. It might come as no surprise to learn that nobody from Abe's government has bothered to turn up and hear his story.

[\[Link\]](#)

Matsumoto full video: Japanese testimony with English translation by Miguel Quintana

00:00 まあ、私たちの部隊に、大隊に、一個大隊に千人ぐらいいるんですけど、5人か6人の慰安婦さんたちを連れて行っているんですね。

Our battalion had approximately one thousand men.

We took about 5 or 6 "comfort women" with us.

00:14 そこで私は衛生兵でしたから、…衛生兵っていうのは分かりますね。

I was a corpsman... do you understand that word?

0031衛生兵ですから、その慰安婦さんたちの性病検査を軍医がやりますよ。私は衛生兵ですから手伝われます。まあ看護婦さんですからね、手伝われますよ。手伝われますから、

I had to help the army doctor to do tests for venereal disease on comfort women.

00:37 性病検査の仕方だとか、道具の扱い方だとか覚えましてね。

I learned the testing methods, how to handle the equipment and all that.

00:45 顕微鏡なんてあるわけがないですから、ただ見るだけですよ。

Obviously we didn't have microscopes, so we did simple visual checks.

00:49なんかこう、ポコッと性器に入れる道具がありまして、それはねポコッと開けると中が見えるんですよ。

There's this instrument you put in the vagina.

It pops open like this and allows you to see inside.

01:07 だから中が、例えばおかしくなっている、とかいうことを見るだけです。

We just visually checked if the inside didn't look funny.

01:15 盂県（ウケン）というところがありますね、ウケンという所は大きな町で、周囲に城壁で囲まれてた大きな町です。そこに大隊本部があります。

There's a place called Yu County .in (Shanxi) China. It was a large city surrounded by ramparts. That's where our battalion had its headquarters.

01:28 それから他に、一中隊とか二中隊とかが、奥地にひとつ(? inaudible)ありますが、そこには慰安婦はいません。大隊本部だけにしかいない。

Apart from that, companies one and two were stationed further away, but there weren't any

comfort women there. You could only find them at battalion headquarters.

01:37 大隊本部には、本部付きというのが、一個中隊と指揮班というのがあって、だいたい300人ぐらいの兵隊がいますね。

Attached to the headquarters were one company and the command section. That was about 300 soldiers.

01:47 それであとは全部むこうの、20キロも、30キロも奥の町や村にずーっと分散して、その辺一帯を、ま、支配している、と申しませうかね。

The rest of the battalion was spread over towns and villages 20 to 30 kilometers further away. They - how can I put it - ruled over that entire area.

02:04 大隊本部付きの兵隊たちは、あるいはたまには行けることもあったかも知れませんが、それは分かりませんね。だいたい、将校、下士官用、だと思えますね。

The men in the company attached to the battalion HQ may have been able to visit the brothels from time to time, but they were primarily meant for the officers and the NCOs.

02:15 そんな、自分の意志で来た人なんてないですよ。自分の意志であんな奥地まで来る人なんてないですよ。

These [women] had definitely not arrived there of their own will. Nobody would be willing to travel to such a remote area.

02:23お金は、その慰安婦さんたちの世話をしている軍属というのがおりましてね、軍人ではないですよ、日本人ですけれども。その人たちが取り仕切ってるんです。

The money was handled by Japanese civilians employed by the military, who took care of the women.

02:39 慰安婦制度がね、慰安婦っていう制度が出来たのがそもそもね、兵隊たちが中国の人た

ちとセックスをして、そしてもう兵隊たちの中に性病が蔓延して、兵隊が全部使いものにならなくなった。

The reason why the comfort women system was set up is that our soldiers were having sex with the Chinese. Diseases started spreading and that would have made the army completely useless.

02:57

それでね、これじゃいかん、という事で、日本の慰安婦制度というのを作って、慰安婦として連れて行くようにしたんです。

This situation was unacceptable, and that's why they created the comfort women system and had those women accompany us.

03:05 部落の急襲をした時、ま、普通は部落を急襲したら、部落内はもう逃げていないんですけども、逃げ遅れた人たちがいて、

When we raided a village, there happened to be some villagers left behind. Normally during a raid all the villagers would flee.

03:14 そしてその人たちの中に婦人たちがいて、7人、8人ぐらいね、

03:14 Among them were seven or eight women.

03:21兵隊たちがみな捕まえて、部落の兵舎に連れて帰ったんです。ですから、その人たちは、抵抗すると殺されますから、もう抵抗しないで付いて来るんです。

The soldiers grabbed them and took them away to the barracks. Knowing that they would be killed if they resisted, these women came along without resisting.

03:34 その人たちを、兵舎の一部のところに住まわせて、そして兵隊たちが勝手に行つては、性交すると。

The women were made to live inside the barracks, and whenever the soldiers felt like it

they would visit them to have sex.

03:50 それで衛生兵の仕事は、その人たちの性病検査をすること。

So my job as a corpsman was to monitor these people for venereal diseases.

03:58 そして医務室には山ほどコンドームがありましたからね、それを兵隊たちに配って、注意しろよ、と言って兵隊に配るとというのが、私の仕事です。衛生兵のしごとです。

The infirmary had a pile of condoms. I distributed them to the soldiers and urged them to be careful. That was my job as a corpsman

04:11 (婦人たちの) 反応はね、もう、抵抗したら殺されること分ってますから、もう従順です。ただもう何にも言わなくて、ただ言われるままにしてるんですよ。

The women understood that they would be killed if they resisted, so they were docile. They didn't say anything; they just did as they were told.

04:26 隊長がね、隊長が1週間ぐらいしてから、「もうよかろう、帰そうじゃないか」と言って、帰したんです。「もう帰んなさい」と言って。

After about one week, our commander said "that's enough, let them go." And he released those women, telling them to go home.

04:39 その代わりにね、村長にね、村長に言って、「婦人を出せ」と。

But in exchange, he asked the head of the village to give us other women.

04:49 それは、ですから、2人来ましたけどね婦人は。その2人の婦人たちは、まあ、そうしたことを仕事にしている人たちだったと思います。

And so two women came to us. I think these two were actually professionals.

05:00でその人たちの性病検査も私の仕事です。

And again, I was in charge of checking them for VD.

05:05 それはもう戦争が終わるまでずーっと、帰って来るまで。帰って来る時はもう、ほったらかしですからね。

That was my job all the way up to the end of the war, until we returned to Japan. When we left, these women were abandoned on the spot.

05:15 強姦はしょっちゅうあるんです、兵隊たちは。もう女を見つけたら強姦するんです。

Rape was rampant among soldiers. As soon as they found a woman, they would rape her.

05:23 色んなことを、いろいろなものを読んでると、やっぱりね、過去をちゃんと見てないものは、また同じことを始める。

While reading all kind of things, I realized that if we don't face our past squarely, we're bound to repeat the same mistakes.

05:31 そうするとね、今の安倍さんなんか見ていると、ほーそうじゃな、また同じこと始めたな。こらやっぱり言わないかんと。

When I look at (Prime Minister) Abe, I think he's starting to do exactly that. Someone needs to speak up.

05:39 これはやっぱりね、自分は、生きている以上は、証言するのが私の（使命）。…92まで生きてるんですから、

And I feel that for as long as I'm alive, I should bear witness to what I saw, having made it to the age of 92.

05:48 あと4, 5年もしたら戦争の体験者はいなくなる、と。僕の存在は今、貴重な存在だ、と。

In another 4 to 5 years those who experienced the war will all have died. I think my existence, right now, is precious.

だからやっぱり言わにゃいかんと。言い続けることが僕の使命だと思って、言っています。

That's why I speak out. Continuing to speak out is my mission, and that's what I'm doing.

06:07

**Jump to the following...**

14:47

Q: 安倍さんは強制はないといってるでしょう？

Mr. Abe is insisting there was no coercion involved in the abduction of the women.

14:52

そんなことないですよ！ そ～んなこと・・・

Such a thing is not true! It's.....

14:58

Q ばかばかしい？

Nonsense?

15:00

ばかばかしい。うそを言うな、っていうんだ。

Nonsense. A lie.

**David McNeill** writes for [The Independent](#) and other publications, including [The Irish Times](#), [The Economist](#) and [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#). An Asia-Pacific Journal coordinator, he is a coauthor of [Strong in the Rain: Surviving Japan's Earthquake, Tsunami and Fukushima Nuclear Disaster](#) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Recommended citation: *David McNeill and Matsumoto Masayoshi, "If we don't face our past, we're bound to repeat the same mistakes. Japanese wartime medical orderly reports on army's role in maintaining 'comfort women' system", The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 12, Issue 42, No. 1, October 20, 2014.*

Related articles

- Asia Pacific Journal and Hokusei University Support Group, Japan's Fundamental Freedoms Imperiled <http://japanfocus.org/events/view/229>
- Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Addressing Japan's 'Comfort Women' Issue From an Academic Standpoint [http://japanfocus.org/-Tessa-Morris\\_Suzuki/4081](http://japanfocus.org/-Tessa-Morris_Suzuki/4081)
- Totsuka Etsuro, [Proposals for Japan and the ROK to Resolve the "Comfort Women" Issue: Creating trust and peace in light of international law](#)
- Okano Yayo, [Toward Resolution of the Comfort Women Issue—The 1000th Wednesday Protest in Seoul and Japanese Intransigence](#)
- Tessa Morris-Suzuki, [Out With Human Rights, In With Government-Authored History: The Comfort Women and the Hashimoto Prescription for a 'New Japan'](#)
- Wada Haruki, [The Comfort Women, the Asian Women's Fund and the Digital Museum](#)
- Hayashi Hirofumi, [Government, the Military and Business in Japan's Wartime Comfort Woman System](#)