

Report: Japan kept Dutch 'comfort girls' in World War II

By BILL LAMP

TOKYO -- The Japanese Imperial Army forced at least 35 Dutch women to provide sex to Japanese front-line soldiers during World War II in the occupied Dutch East Indies, the Asahi Shimbun reported Tuesday.

Japanese soldiers lured the women into service by promising them jobs as waitresses and then forcing them to provide sex to Japanese officers on threat of 'death by brutal means' or revenge on their families, the Asahi Shimbun quoted documents from the 1948 war crimes trials in The Hague as saying.

The issue of 'comfort girls,' as they are known in Japanese euphemism, became a political bombshell for Tokyo in December when a researcher found hard evidence of direct government involvement that escaped the frantic rush at war's end to burn incriminating documents.

Historians have long maintained as many as 200,000 girls and women -- mainly from Korea, Taiwan, and China -- were forced into government-run brothels, but Tokyo had insisted that the project was entirely private and that it bore no moral or legal responsibility for the plight of the women.

On July 7, after a six-month search in several ministries for documents bearing on the case, the government bowed to heavy pressure from Asian neighbors and acknowledged it had been the driving force behind the brothels, but added it had found no evidence the girls and women had been forced to become prostitutes.

The Asahi report was apparently the first time a case involving European women became public.

The Asahi said 11 officers were given prison terms and one officer was sentenced to death by the war crimes court for their part in running four brothels where the Dutch women were held.

The brothels were in operation for only one month before army headquarters ordered them closed.

In their testimony, the women said there were about 100 Dutch women on Java at the time who were being forced to provide sex to Japanese soldiers. Court documents said the women, between the ages of 18 and 26, were confined to a single room and beaten.

Chief Cabinet spokesman Koichi Kato said Japan would apologize to the Netherlands if the report is shown to be true.

During a visit in October, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands delivered unusually blunt remarks to Emperor Akihito about the 'deep gulf' that still exists between the two nations that was caused by Japan's wartime detention of 140,000 Dutch nationals, some of whom still bear the scars.

The remarks caused a stir among Japanese diplomats responsible for protocol.

Japan has so far released evidence that girls and women from Korean, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan and the Philippines. When the results of the investigation were announced, Kato hinted that Japan may consider paying compensation to the surviving women.