



Chizu Kurita with local children in East Timor

SERIES

*Yamato
Nadeshiko*

An Officer and a Lady

Lieutenant Colonel Chizu Kurita of the Joint Staff, Ministry of Defense, was dispatched to the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) last year as a military liaison staff. She is the first Japanese female member of the Japan Self-Defense Forces dispatched individually to a peacekeeping operation by the United Nations. Osamu Sawaji of the *Japan Journal* interviewed Lieutenant Colonel Kurita.

What made you interested in joining the Japan Self-Defense Forces?

Lieutenant Colonel Chizu Kurita: I had the chance to learn about working in the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) when I was a high school student. I researched the JSDF and found out that it also welcomed women. I thought that if I worked hard enough, the hierarchical structure of the JSDF would let me attain self-

realization. Before I enlisted I thought about what I wanted to do by trying many things, and I still question myself daily about what it means to be female JSDF member. It just seems like working for my country as a member of the JSDF is an extremely natural choice for me, no matter what duties I am engaged in.

Female JSDF members account for 5% of all members. Are you especially conscious of the fact you are a woman while working with the JSDF?

I was assigned to the anti-air missile unit for about nine years after joining the JSDF. Men and women are basically not differentiated between when performing their duties. I painted my face green, covered my back with grass for camouflage and carried a gun in drills in the exercise area, alongside the men. About three years ago, as a commander I led a unit of over sixty for two years. When my unit lined up with other units during exercises, it predictably got attention for being commanded by a woman. I quickly and lightly instructed

them so this woman-led unit wouldn't appear like it was erratic, and I felt my unit fully cooperated and supported me.

I think one of the values of female JSDF members is the motherliness of women. Other members felt free to speak to me even about trivial things in their daily lives, and this atmosphere helped boost the vitality of the unit. I think we female members should never lose our feminine qualities, all the more because the JSDF is a man's world.

What missions were you engaged in during the half-year you were dispatched to East Timor as a military communication representative for the UN?

When I was appointed, I felt greatly honored but at the same time I was uncertain whether I could fulfill my assignment. Yet above that, I thought the overseas mission would help me develop my future career. In East Timor I visited towns and villages mainly in the region called Baukau to collect information there. I interviewed police, hospital workers, educational workers and village mayors, and reported everything I was able to find out including trends of political par-

ties, youth groups and other information on security, as well as the food, hygiene and educational situations. I was in a camouflage uniform, but perhaps because I am a woman, the local people seemed to feel safe speaking with me. By the way, my name Kurita means "octopus" in the local language, so I often did a funny dance like an octopus, which made the children and adults laugh [laughter].

What duties have you been assigned since returning to Japan?

I am in charge of coordination related to defense cooperation and exchanges with ASEAN countries, New Zealand, Australia and other countries. If I have the chance, I hope to take part in international tasks such as introducing JSDF activities to other countries, and activities involving the people of other countries. In any case, I would like to continue working to the retirement age of fifty-five.



Lieutenant Colonel Chizu Kurita in uniform