

The Imperial Japanese Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand

Prelude to the Invasion of 8 December 1941

William L. Swan



The building that once housed the Imperial Japanese Consulate in Songkhla
(photo by the author March 1968)

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Introduction

During the mid 1980s while I was doing research and study for my Ph.D., and for a number of years thereafter, I gathered information and interviews about the consulate that Imperial Japan established in Songkhla, Thailand, at the beginning of April 1941 to help in the planning of Japan’s invasion of Malaya that took place eight months later in early December of that year.

Around 1992, I wrote a first abbreviated version of the Songkhla consulate story that covered the eight months up to the time of the December 8th invasion. I intended to continue the story narrating what happened following the invasion; however, for the next 25 years, I did nothing more with the story or the information I had gathered. On retiring in 2009, one of the project that I envisioned for filling my newly acquired free time was completing the consulate story begun so many years earlier. But another seven years would pass before I finally got down to doing it.

In early 2016 I began reacquainting myself with all the materials I had collected about the Songkhla consulate and with the first version of the consulate story I had written two and a half decades earlier. The pages that follow are the result of this renewed year-long project.

The story text is augmented with five maps and a collection of 14 photographs, six of which were taken by the author, two from 1968 taken when he was serving in the Peace Corps in Songkhla.

William L. Swan

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Establishing the Consulate

The morning was clear and pleasantly warm. A gathering of Thais and Japanese stood about the newly landscaped grounds of a large, wooden, two-story building. The date was 1 April 1941, and the occasion was the opening ceremony of the new Imperial Japanese Consulate at Songkhla. About 30 Japanese were present, most of whom were employees manning local offices of Japanese companies or were expatriates who had taken up residence in southern Thailand. Among the latter were Dr. Seto Hisao and his wife; he ran a clinic in Songkhla. Also present were the provincial governor, the chief of police and the commander of the local Thai military forces. They were accompanied by around a half dozen other Thai officials. Three officials from the Japanese legation in Bangkok were also present. One was Asada Shunsuke, the consul-general, who had been posted to the legation since early 1940. He was the highest ranking Japanese at the ceremony. With him were Consul Amada Rokurō, Asada's deputy, and Nishino Junjirō, a young foreign service officer who had arrived in Bangkok three years earlier as a student attaché to study Thai language. He had joined the legation in 1940 after completing his language study. He was the interpreter for the ceremony.¹

Leading the ceremony was the new consul in Songkhla, Katsuno Toshio, a heavy-set, self-confident man with a penchant for boasting, and a heavy drinker lacking the refinements characteristic of a diplomat. Born in March, 1891, in what was then the town of Katsuyama, Maniwa district, in Okayama prefecture, he had passed the consular-level examination for the foreign service in 1922. Prior to that, however, Katsuno's life had taken a course rather different from that which usually led to a job in Japan's foreign service, and which gave clear indication of the bold, self-confident and atypical character that would affect his later foreign service career. He attended Osaka's Ichioka Middle School² and after graduation had gone on to Kansai University where he enrolled in the faculty of law. He pursued his studies for three years, but he wanted to go abroad. In November of 1913 he quit university, and a month later, on Christmas Eve, he left for Australia.

Katsuno arrived in Sydney where he found a job at a department store. It was now 1914. In March he celebrated his 23rd birthday. Katsuno reminisced about his sojourn "down under"³:

I wanted to go abroad, so I went to Australia. I was a clerk at a small department store. I studied English. I studied how to speak English. I'd give chocolate to children and let them speak, let them pronounce the alphabet, and I'd watch how they opened and turned their mouths and how they

¹ Hatakeyama, pp. 19–20; Nishino interview, 26 May 1989.

² Hatakeyama, p. 16. At that time in the Japanese school system, middle school was the equivalent of high school today.

³ From Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983.

pronounced. Back then that was 'White Australia'. It was anti-Japanese, anti-Asian. The clients at the department store were almost all white people. But I met an Anglican priest, Reverend Needham. He told me to come to church. He spoke about Christ twice a week sitting on the veranda of the church. So I went to the evening prayer, and I did the prayers in English, and sang the songs in English. That's how I got my English.

In mid 1916, after two and a half years in Australia, Katsuno returned to Japan. He worked the next six years for a Mr. Dixon, a Sydney brush merchant and exporter with a business in Osaka. In April 1922 he passed the foreign service consular-level exam.⁴ Katsuno was now 31 years old.

Shortly after entering the foreign service in the spring of 1922, Katsuno was sent as a *shokisei* (書記生), a consulate chief secretary, to work at the Japanese consulate in Chifeng⁵ in what was then south-eastern Manchuria. He remained in Manchuria for the next five years, moving to Harbin⁶ in 1923, then Liaoyang⁷ in 1925. During 1927 and the first half of 1928 he was assigned to the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo working in the commerce office. Then from mid 1928 until the end of 1929, he was posted as chief secretary to the consulate in Colombo, Ceylon. For the first four months of 1930 he was back in the ministry in Tokyo, again in the commerce office. Then in May he was sent to Jinan,⁸ a city about 370 kilometers south of Beijing. The situation had changed greatly in China since Katsuno had left in 1926. In 1928 Jinan had been the scene of a bloody clash between Japanese and Chinese forces. The incident sparked a Chinese boycott against Japanese trade in China and greatly aggravated relations between the two countries. Then in September 1931, a little over a year after Katsuno's arrival in Jinan, the Manchurian Incident broke out. The establishment of the "State of Manchukuo"⁹ the following year further antagonized the Chinese. During ensuing years the Japanese army encroached deeper into northern China. Through these years of tension, Katsuno evidently displayed ability and courage, for he was honored in 1934 and awarded 85 yen¹⁰ for distinguished service performed in 1931 and 1934, two years marked by exceptionally heavy fighting between Japan and China.

In July 1936 Katsuno was posted to Dunhua¹¹ in southeastern Manchuria where the Japanese consulate-general in Jilin¹² maintained a branch office. The next month he was put in charge of that office. In 1937 he was transferred to Suiyuan¹³ in Inner Mongolia, north of Shaanxi province, to head a consular satellite office. Then in July 1938 he was raised to the rank of vice-consul and posted to

⁴ Information on Katsuno's background from Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Hatakeyama, p. 16; Gaimushō, *Gaimushō nenkan*, p. 262; Gaimushō, *Gaimushō shokunin haizokuhyō*, pp. 16 and 17.

⁵ 赤峰.

⁶ 哈尔滨/哈爾濱.

⁷ 辽阳/寮陽.

⁸ 濟南.

⁹ Japanese: *Manshūkoku* (滿州国).

¹⁰ Equal to \$25 at the 1934 exchange rate of ¥3.4=\$1.00.

¹¹ 敦化.

¹² 吉林.

¹³ 綏远/綏遠.

Houhe.¹⁴ In April the next year, Katsuno moved to the Jinan consulate where he remained until the beginning of 1941 when he was recalled to Tokyo and told of his posting to Thailand to set up the Japanese consulate in Songkhla.¹⁵

During his many years in north China, Katsuno had become a fluent speaker of Mandarin Chinese and developed an affinity for China and its people. And he liked parties, good food and hard liquor. At times after enjoying a fine meal and a good deal of drink at a local restaurant, he would break into one of the many Chinese songs he knew. This aspect of his nature, Katsuno felt, had helped him to get along well with the Chinese people.¹⁶

His relations with the Japanese military, on the other hand, were much less comfortable. Following the Army's instigated "incident" in Manchuria in September 1931, then its full-scale invasion of China's northeast, Katsuno and his foreign service colleagues working in the region experienced growing Army interference in the conduct of their work and areas of responsibility. In Japan the increasing influence of the military over the political and economic affairs of the nation during the 1930s was marked by two events, the so-called May 15 and February 26 incidents,¹⁷ the former in 1932, the latter in 1936. Both were coup d'état attempts by junior officers to overthrow the government



Consul Katsuno Toshio
(photo from the Internet)

and set up military rule. Both failed but their aftermath led to greater military influence over the affairs of the Japanese state.

For Katsuno and his fellow foreign service officers in Manchuria, dealing with the demands of arrogant, condescending army commanders turned into a regular headache and frustration of the job. Katsuno was older and more worldly experienced on entering the foreign service. By the 1930s, he had worked a decade in Manchuria and acquired command of the Chinese language. Moreover, he was not the refined, civil and cultured officer that one typically finds in the diplomatic service. Instead he was a rough, boastful person who liked to brag about his prowess at kendo. He was a heavy drinker; he liked to party, get drunk and sing Chinese songs. He distained arrogant military officers and learned that cultivating drinking

and entertainment relations with their superiors was a means of applying some restraint on the

¹⁴ The characters in the Japanese source naming this location are 厚和, but I was unable to locate any place in China having this name.

¹⁵ Information about Katsuno's foreign service career from Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Hatakeyama, p. 16; Gaimushō, *Gaimushō shokunin*, pp. 16 and 17; and Gaimushō, *Gaimushō nenkan*, p. 262.

¹⁶ Katsuno interview, 26 Mar 1983. Katsuno said he took up singing Chinese songs as part of his learning to speak Chinese. Impressing Chinese by singing their songs became an important means Katsuno used to build connections and rapport between himself and local Chinese community and business leaders.

¹⁷ Known in Japan respectively as the *Go-Ichi-Go Jiken* (五・一五事件 [Five-One-Five Incident]) and *Ni-Ni-Roku Jiken* (二・二六事件 [Two-Two-Six Incident]).

behavior of local military units. A junior secretary, who one day would be assigned to Katsuno's staff, described how the consul dealt with obstreperous army officers who came to the consulate to complain about one matter or another. An argument would invariably arise. If the officer were of company grade, Katsuno would start talking about the field-grade officers he knew at headquarters. If the officer were field grade, Katsuno would talk about this colonel and that colonel he hobnobbed with or some general he knew. The amused secretary would watch as Katsuno faced off with a clearly flustered junior officer who was not sure about challenging this untimidated consul.¹⁸ And Katsuno was not beyond daring to challenge soldiers. Recalling his time in China and how the soldiers swaggered about, contemptuous of foreign service officers and civilians alike, Katsuno commented¹⁹:

I wasn't afraid of them. I could handle them. I was bigger than most of them, and I knew kendo. I was a champion kendo swordsman. I had practiced for many years. Sometimes when I got drunk, my anger would show, and I would challenge some of those swaggerers to a duel. On several occasions I threatened to kill some who dared challenge me. You see, the army in China came to think that the ambassadors and consuls were there to be ordered about and do the army's bidding. No military officer ever ordered me to do anything. If anything, I ordered them. Of course, this made them angry, but I could handle them. The military people around me knew I wasn't afraid of them.

There was bravado in this recollection, but Katsuno was indeed a good kendo swordsman, having begun practicing at the age of twelve under the tutelage of an uncle. By the time he entered university, he had achieved *yon-dan* (fourth-degree) rank. He was also above average height for a Japanese and weighed close to 85 kilos (185 pounds), making him much heavier than most Japanese of the time.²⁰ His physical advantage, along with his self-confident, bold demeanor and his known kendo skills put substance into his threats.

At the new Songkhla consulate the opening ceremony began with congratulatory speeches followed by dedication of the sign at the front gate announcing in Thai and Japanese that here stood the consulate of imperial Japan. Then to applause by all, the curtain was dropped to reveal a glistening, golden chrysanthemum, the nation's coat-of-arms, attached above the building's second floor. As the applause quieted, Katsuno walked over to the flag pole that stood in the center of the circular drive-way in front of the consulate. He slowly raised the Rising-Sun Flag as all the Japanese present began to intone "Kimigayo," the national anthem. It was a spine-tingling moment. The flag of their homeland unfurled against the clear sky of southern Thailand. Pride filled them. Now Japan had a presence in the south, rivaling that of Great Britain, the only other nation with a consulate in

¹⁸ Okamaru interview, 17 March 1989.

¹⁹ From Katsuno interview, 28 March 1983.

²⁰ Katsuno interview, 28 March 1983; Hatakeyama, p. 16.

Songkhla. “Ah, I never want to lower it,” Katsuno thought to himself as he stood looking up proudly at the flag he had just raised.²¹

The establishment of a consulate in Songkhla was an important step for the Japanese military in planning the attack on Singapore. Prior to pressure from the military, the Foreign Ministry saw no need for regional consulates in Thailand. Very few expatriates and long-term Japanese residents lived in upcountry Thailand, especially in the south. But the military pressed the Foreign Ministry for a consulate to use as a center for gathering intelligence about conditions on the Malay Peninsula that would help guide preparations for the campaign to capture Singapore.²² The first step in these preparations had been taken back in October and November of 1940 when the battle-proven 5th Division in southern China moved via Tongking in French Indo-China to the Shanghai area where it spent the following months being refitted as a mechanized division. From spring 1941 the division was ordered to begin training in amphibious landing operations. The 5th Division along with the 18th and Imperial Guard divisions would make up the main force of the 25th Army that was to undertake the campaign to capture Singapore.

With military preparations under way, the need to collect as much intelligence as possible about the Malay Peninsula became an urgent task; thus the military pushed the Foreign Ministry to open a consulate in Songkhla. Establishing a consulate there was permissible under the treaty relations Japan had with Thailand. The Thai government had signed most-favored nation agreements with the major powers of the world, Japan being one, which allowed for the mutual establishment of diplomatic and consular offices in locations where other most-favored nations maintained such offices. Britain had maintained a consulate in Songkhla since 1910,²³ and Japan now, on the basis of its treaty agreements with Thailand, requested and was granted permission to establish a consulate there as well. The Japanese military now pressed anxiously for the foreign office to fill the post and get the consulate functioning as quickly as possible.

The time was now February 1941, and Katsuno was in Tokyo, having been called back from his post in Jinan. He was at the Foreign Ministry office one day shortly past midmonth when he ran into his bureau chief. A discussion like the one below took place between the two²⁴:

“Katsuno, I’ve been looking for you. I tried to contact you at Jinan, but you’d already left.”

“What is it? Something urgent?” Katsuno inquired.

“It’s more than urgent. We’d like you to go as our consul to Songkhla.”

“Songkhla?” Katsuno had never heard of a Japanese consulate in such a place. “Where’s that?”

²¹ Hatakeyama, p. 20, which includes Katsuno’s quote (this author’s translation); Nishino interview, 26 May 1989.

²² Nishino interview, 26 May 1989. A consulate was opened in Chiang Mai in September 1941 to facilitate intelligence gathering for the invasion of Burma (Myanmar).

²³ *Room for Diplomacy*, Thai Consulates: Singora. The British established a consulate in Songkhla to oversee the many Malays in southern Thailand who carried citizenship in the British Empire (“Songkhla History”).

²⁴ Related in Hatakeyama, pp. 15–16 (this author’s translation).

“In southern Thailand, on the Malay Peninsula, not far from old Ligor²⁵ of Yamada Nagamasa fame.²⁶ You’ll be a Nagamasa of the Shōwa Era.²⁷ It’s really important and I’d like you to do it for us.” Without pausing the chief added, “We’ve given it a lot of thought here, but there isn’t anyone better suited for the job than you. I know it’s very sudden to put this on you, but I want you to take it.”

As he spoke the chief pulled out an old map, and Katsuno sensed from his words that the place he was being asked to go was someplace not at all pleasant.

“Here it is.” The chief pointed to a spot midway down the peninsula. “A small town, less than ten thousand people.”

“Do we have a consulate down in a place like that?” Katsuno asked wonderingly.

“No, we don’t. You’re going to be the first. We want you to have it opened by April. We’re really in a hurry.”

Gauging from the chief’s words and from where he pointed on the map, Katsuno did not further pursue the reason for opening a consulate in that small, remote place. Though still only vaguely, he was beginning to grasp the meaning behind the words he was hearing. As he was about to leave, the chief turned to him and said softly, “Two soldiers will be coming down later.”

Katsuno had to wait a week before he could get an airplane leaving Japan. While waiting he dropped in one day on his friend Ushijima Keijirō, at the time a major general in the reserves. They had known each other since Katsuno’s days in Dunhoa in 1936 when Ushijima was commanding the garrison there. Katsuno talked about his new assignment to southern Thailand. Ushijima quickly sensed the reason for his appointment. The army was very interested in that area. Katsuno too had begun to understand the situation and to comprehend fully his bureau chief’s last words about the two soldiers. It all rather upset him. He had experienced warfare in China and did not relish being caught up in it again. Ushijima told his visitor that the Foreign Ministry had probably given the appointment a good deal of thought.

“Why do you say that?” Katsuno wondered.

“Well, there’s probably going to be quite a bit of trouble down there. The soldiers can be expected to

²⁵ The classical name for Nakhon Si Thammarat.

²⁶ A Japanese adventurer, Yamada Nagamasa (山田長政, 1590–1630) arrived in Ayutthaya around 1612 aboard a “vermillion-seal ship” (*shu-in-sen*/朱印船), an armed merchant ship sanctioned by the Japanese Tokugawa shogun to trade with Siam. He remained in Ayutthaya, moving into the sector of the capital known as the Japanese village. By 1619 Yamada had become chief of that village and proved himself a reliable and helpful supporter of King Songtham (ทรงธรรม). His good relations with the king led to Yamada’s rise up the noble ranks ultimately becoming *okya* with the title *Okya Sēnāphimuk* (ออกญาเสนาภิมุข). King Songtham died in 1628. The throne was usurped by the court’s ranking minister, Phraya Siworawong (พระยาศรีวรวงศ์), who became King Prāsātthawng (ปราสาททอง). The new king was ill-disposed toward Yamada. It is not clear if he sent Yamada to be governor of Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat) to get him out of Ayutthaya, or if Yamada had already been given the governorship by King Songtham for his loyalty. Yamada died in Ligor in 1630, either from wounds sustained in the turmoil that broke out following Prāsātthawng’s usurpation, or by poisoning at the instigation of Prāsātthawng.

During the 1930s as Japan’s interests in Thailand rose, Yamada Nagamasa and his exploits in Ayutthaya were resurrected and promoted by Japan’s leadership to embellish that brief, long-ago connection between the two countries as Japan sought to cultivate closer relations with Thailand.

²⁷ The period from the end of 1926 to the beginning of 1989 that marked the reign of the Shōwa Emperor, the reign name of Emperor Hirohito.

act pretty arrogantly. They'll get into fights and everything, and there will have to be someone down there who can handle the situation. Perhaps I shouldn't say this because the bullets could start flying around down there too, but you after all were the one they tapped to do the job."²⁸

Katsuno listened. The bureau chief too had said there was no one else more suitable. Perhaps he was the one meant for the job. He had earned a reputation in the China service for his rough, unrefined character and intimidating personality which were unusual for a diplomat, so it is quite possible that he was specifically selected to set up the Songkhla consulate. Its main purpose was to be a spy center. Army officers would be on its staff, and military personnel incognito would be frequent visitors. A consul capable of dealing with pushy, demanding military officers was needed to head the office. A junior secretary assigned for half a year to the Songkhla consulate described Katsuno's suitability for the job²⁹:

He was unusual, very unusual. You hardly found that type of man in the Foreign Office. He was tough; yes, tough in a sense. There was no one, I didn't know any other person who could have been expected to do that job because Katsuno could resist the Army, but still make the minimum compromise to cooperate with the Army.

Katsuno's family was living in Lüshun (Port Arthur) in Manchuria.³⁰ He informed them of his new assignment and asked them to send him some of his summer clothes. Then on the last day of February 1941, he flew out of Fukuoka for Bangkok. On arrival in the Thai capital, Katsuno took a room at the Oriental Hotel, then immediately headed over to the legation where his arrival surprised everyone. No one, not even Minister Futami Yasusato, the legation head, had been expecting Katsuno. The Foreign Ministry had still not notified anyone in Bangkok of the new appointment. They had only been informed that a consulate was to be opened in Songkhla. In preparation for this, Amada had contacted a local Japanese who in turn had found a building that could be rented for the purpose. The people in Bangkok were expecting someone from the legation to take up the post, so Katsuno's sudden arrival surprised everyone and upset some who felt that a person familiar with the country should have been appointed consul.

Asada, the consul-general, quickly took the situation in hand. He told Katsuno to check out of the Oriental immediately. It was too expensive. More importantly, Asada wanted him to move in with Amada, a Thailand specialist who could prepare Katsuno for his Songkhla assignment. Amada piled the new consul with books on Thailand which Katsuno read through one after another. The two men talked at length about the readings and about the situation in the country. One point Katsuno noted was the anti-Japanese feeling that he was told pervaded the local Chinese community in the far south.

²⁸ This visit with Ushijima related in Hatakeyama, pp. 16–17 (this author's translation).

²⁹ From Okamaru interview, 17 March 1989.

³⁰ The narration in the following paragraphs about Katsuno going to Bangkok and Songkhla is from Hatakeyama, pp. 16–18.

They had close contacts with the Chinese in Malaya where anti-Japanese feelings were high. This could cause difficulties, he was told, or even be a danger. From his concentration of reading and discussions with Amada, in little more than a week, Katsuno had gained a grasp of the situation in Thailand; and his task, as he had largely expected, was primarily to gather intelligence on conditions in southern Thailand and Malaya.

With half of March nearly past and hardly more than two weeks remaining before the consulate was due to open, Asada called Katsuno in. It was time, he said, to get down to Songkhla and get to work. Katsuno listened.

“There’s a doctor down there by the name of Seto. You can discuss everything with him. And please do all your communicating directly with me.”³¹

Katsuno understood. In the short time he had been at the legation, he had realized that Asada was in charge. Normally a consul would report directly to the legation minister. But in a few months the legation would be raised to the status of embassy, and during the transition until the posting of the new ambassador, the consul-general was in charge at the legation. Asada’s words made Katsuno sense all the more the secrecy surrounding the mission that the Songkhla consulate was expected to perform.

Katsuno took the train to Hādyai. From there one of the local Japanese drove him to Songkhla where he took a room at the Songkhla Railroad Hotel. In his reminiscing,³² Katsuno did not mention who took him to Songkhla. Likely it could have been Dr. Seto, the most prominent local Japanese living in Songkhla, although it might have been someone from the Japanese business community in Hādyai. From his hotel Katsuno went to have a look at the building that was to serve as the consulate. Katsuno did not mention anyone showing him the way, but likely it would have been Dr. Seto, who, given his prominence in Songkhla, had likely been the one whom Amada had contacted to find a building and negotiate a rental agreement with the property owner.

The building was some distance north of the main part of town in a sparsely populated area at the northern end of Ramwithi Road³³ near the intersection with Sai’ngam Road.³⁴ Next door was a women’s teacher training school, and about 500 meters further north, at the foot of Noe Hill³⁵ along Sukhum Road,³⁶ stood the British consulate.³⁷ Katsuno’s to-be consulate was a suitably big wooden two-story building with large verandas on both floors. However, it was unimpressive. It apparently had served as a hotel, but an inspection indicated that it had been an establishment of questionable repute. Katsuno found what looked like the residue of rouge and makeup in the rooms, and hanging on the walls here and there were old magazine pictures of mostly nude men and women. The surrounding

³¹ Quote from Hatakeyama, p. 18 (this author’s translation). Hatakeyama mistakenly said Seto was a dentist.

³² As narrated in Hatakeyama, p. 18.

³³ Thanon Ramwithi (ถนนรามวิถี).

³⁴ Thanon Sai’ngam (ถนนไทรงาม).

³⁵ Khao Noe (เขาน้อย).

³⁶ Thanon Sukhum [ถนนสุขุม].

³⁷ Description of consulate building’s location from the author’s own experience of living in Songkhla.

compound, while spacious, had been badly neglected. Katsuno could not help but feel disappointed. As it stood, the building was absolutely unfit to be a consulate. It totally lacked the dignity and authority that one expected of an office representing a first-class nation. But it was the building he had been handed with a mere two weeks before April 1st, the date the consulate had to be opened. In a quandary what to do, Katsuno turned to Dr. Seto. "He can help you," Asada had mentioned as Katsuno was about to depart for Songkhla; "You can discuss everything with him."

Dr. Seto Hisao, born in the early 1890s in Kishimoto, a coastal town in Wakayama prefecture, had left Japan as a young man for *Nanyō*, the Southern Seas, as did many young Japanese of that period, in search of greater opportunities. He arrived in Singapore around the transition from the Meiji to Taishō period in 1912. He lived in Singapore and Malaya for about a decade.³⁸ The course his livelihood followed is unclear. He probably worked at various jobs after coming to Singapore and Malaya, eventually becoming an itinerant salesman "doctor" selling medicines and potions. He might have spent time working for a British (or British-trained) doctor at one of Malaya's British-run rubber plantations, thereby acquired some medical experience, and he probably moved to Thailand because it was easier to purchase a doctor's license.³⁹

Around 1925 Seto moved to Thailand taking up residence in Phuket on the peninsula's west coast.



Seto Hisao
(photo from the Internet)

There he opened a pharmacy and settled down with a Japanese woman named Teru; they lived together but never married. In 1931 a son, Masao, was born.⁴⁰ That was also the year that the Japanese army took over Manchuria in the so-called Manchurian Incident. A strong anti-Japanese reaction ensued not only in China but also among the Chinese living overseas. Phuket had a sizable overseas Chinese population, many of whom worked in the local tin mines. Chinese community leaders organized a boycott of the small Japanese community. The Chinese stopped dealing with and patronizing Japanese businesses, and shut their businesses to Japanese patrons. Threats and intimidation of Japanese increased. Seto's pharmacy business suffered. It grew more difficult to make a living. This coupled with the unease pervading daily life finally caused Seto to take his family and move to Bangkok where he

³⁸ Information about Seto Hisao from Seto, pp. 11, 14, 17, 18.

³⁹ From Nishimaki interview, 14 May 1987. Seto's son, Masao, thought that his father was already a doctor when he left Japan (Seto interview, 13 Aug 1983). But it was the consensus of former consulate staff members, whom this author interviewed and who had known Seto, that he had not had any formal medical training, had acquired his medical and pharmaceutical knowledge while living in Malaya, and that in Thailand he had bought his license to be a doctor.

⁴⁰ Until 1946 Masao had thought that Teru was his mother. But that year, following their receipt of permission to remain in Thailand and their release from the internment camp at Ban Buathong in Nonthaburi, she told Masao that she was not his real mother. His real mother was a Thai woman who had been his father's mistress. (information from Seto interview, 13 Aug 1983, and from Seto's reminiscence *Thai ni ikite*, pp. 16-17)

found work at the Japanese-run Hinode Hospital. But trying to make a living in Bangkok was difficult, so in 1935 he returned to the south, moving to Songkhla.

In Songkhla Seto rented a sizeable two-story brick and stucco building at the intersection of Saiburi⁴¹ and Phetkhiri⁴² roads diagonally from Dawnrak Temple.⁴³ The family home occupied the second floor while on the first floor Seto opened a pharmacy-cum-clinic that he named Recover Life, the two Chinese characters 回生⁴⁴ appearing on the front signboard. The local Japanese pronounced the name *kaisei*; the Thais pronounced it *gaiche*, and that was the name Seto and his family came to be known by in the local community. He was Maw Gaiche⁴⁵ (Dr. Gaiche). According to son Masao, his father earned a reputation as a kind, generous person who would not demand payment from patrons too poor to pay, and he often received goods and agricultural products as payment for his services.

When the Seto family took up residence in Songkhla, only a few other Japanese were living in the town. There was a dentist, Hisamatsu Tanoshi, and his wife. They had a daughter who had married a Thai and was also living in Songkhla. The Hisamatsus had come to Songkhla before the First World War, and he and his wife had both died before the Second World War broke out. There was also a Japanese woman who ran a shop selling dishes and other ceramic ware. Later another doctor, Takigawa Torawaka, and his wife settled in Songkhla, followed by a dentist named Nishino.

Sometime after moving to Songkhla, Seto began providing information about the area to Japanese military authorities. Just when he started is not known. He never told his family about this activity. But years later his son, Masao, recalled a particular day, probably in 1939. Masao was about eight years old at the time and had just returned home on spring vacation from Bangkok where he was attending the Japanese school. Therefore the event probably took place around April. It was in the morning. A Japanese man was visiting his father. The two were going to go fishing, and Seto told his son to come along. They rented a boat, but instead of the usual procedure of having a Thai fisherman at the helm, Seto handled the boat himself, taking it out into the waters around Cat and Mouse islands, two small islands lying a short distance off the Songkhla coast, then returning to Songkhla Lake and going among the islands that lay several kilometers off Songkhla harbor.

The three were out the entire day, but they did not fish. The fishing lines on the poles were marked off in measurements, and the two men spent the entire time measuring the water depth. They did have one pole trailing a line and hook from the back of the boat, but they never caught any fish. On recalling the experience, Masao surmised that the visitor had been an officer in the military and that he himself had been brought along to allay suspicions because people would have been less apt to think that something irregular was happening if a child were along. Masao never went out fishing

⁴¹ Thanon Saiburi (ถนนไทรบุรี).

⁴² Thanon Phetkhiri (ถนนเพชรคีรี).

⁴³ Wat Dawnrak (วัดดอนรัก).

⁴⁴ Quite possibly the characters were 回生, 回 being an archaic form of 回. 回 was the character that Suchāt Ratanaprakān (an interviewee) wrote as being on the sign.

⁴⁵ หมอไกเซ.

again,⁴⁶ and perhaps neither did his father. But others in town noticed occasions when Japanese visitors went out onto the lake. One such person was Suchāt Ratanaprakān, a prominent member of the town and owner of Songkhla's largest rice mill, a big building painted a bright red, thus known locally as the "Red Mill."⁴⁷ Located at the port, the building provided a panoramic view of Songkhla Lake where Suchāt occasionally noticed Japanese out "fishing."⁴⁸

By the end of the 1930s, the Seto home was receiving a growing number of Japanese visitors. Though they always came as ordinary citizens, their demeanor and at times their haircuts as well indicated that more likely than not a military man was hidden behind the civilian exterior. By 1941 Dr. Seto had become an important contact and means for gathering information in Songkhla. This was the Dr. Seto that Katsuno, the consul without a consulate, now turned to.

With Seto's assistance a large crew of carpenters, painters and laborers was soon assembled. Katsuno had them divided into shifts that set to work around the clock renovating the consulate.⁴⁹ He induced a few shopkeepers to set up noodle and drink stalls in the building where the workers could eat and drink all they wanted with the consulate picking up the bill. It was a novel arrangement which proved agreeable to all, and the renovation work moved along rapidly. As the end of March approached, the building had taken on a much grander appearance, very much more befitting an imperial Japanese consulate.

As the renovation work progressed, Katsuno began exploring the town of Songkhla. Being able to speak and write Chinese, he immediately began making contact with local ethnic Chinese merchants to enlist their help with setting up the consulate and to make arrangements for the grand party he envisioned to celebrate its opening. The main part of town was concentrated along four to five streets that paralleled the harbor front. The building that would soon be the Japanese consulate was located some distance from the town center. The area was sparsely populated with houses scattered along the few roads leading out to the coast. To Katsuno, Songkhla was hardly a town, especially when compared with the ones he had known in China. As he explored the town, a thought began to worry him. In such a rural location, would he be able to procure sufficient food and drink for his grand celebration to mark the consulate's opening on April 1st?

Another thing that struck Katsuno was the lack of animosity toward him, unlike what the legation people in Bangkok had told him. He had no trouble talking with the local Chinese, nor had he run into problems getting cooperation to renovate the consulate. There was no difficulty hiring a chauffeur to drive the consulate car. The man who took the job, Mon Charœnsin, was the brother of the provincial education officer.⁵⁰ And Katsuno soon found a caretaker to look after the consulate building and

⁴⁶ Information about the fishing experience from Seto interview, 13 Aug 1983.

⁴⁷ The mill's official name is the Haphohin Rice Mill (Rōngsi Haphōhin [โรงสีหับโห้หิ้น]). Although long out of business, the building still stands at the upper end of Nakhawn-nawk Road.

⁴⁸ Suchāt interview, 15 Sep 1983.

⁴⁹ The narration in the following paragraphs about the consulate and the local Chinese is from Hatakeyama, pp. 18–19.

⁵⁰ Plæk, p. 7; Plæk interview, 14 Sep 1983.

grounds. He encountered no difficulties at all. However, he realized that the main concentration of local Chinese was not in Songkhla but 30 kilometers (19 miles) inland in the town of Hādyai. There he could probably expect to find strong anti-Japanese sentiment. The experience of Mitsui Bussan, Japan's largest trading company, was a case in point. A year or so earlier the company had tried to open an office in Hādyai, but no one would rent it premises. The company finally had to settle for a dilapidated building on the outskirts of town.⁵¹ Wondering just how strong the supposed anti-Japanese feeling was in Hādyai, Katsuno tried out some of the town's eateries and chatted with the Chinese locals. He then decided to try a little test. He would send invitations for his upcoming celebration to the important Chinese merchants in Hādyai. After some checking, he settled on 35 names and sent out his invitations. He wanted to see how many would accept.⁵²

Following the morning ceremony opening the new consulate, Katsuno completed preparations for his grand celebration that took place that evening at the Songkhla Provincial Association Hall⁵³ near the beach overlooking Samila Point.⁵⁴ It was a huge gathering, some 300 people in all.⁵⁵ Alan Oldham,⁵⁶ the British consul, was there along with all the leading Thai officials and Chinese merchants including, according to Katsuno, 34 of the 35 merchants from Hādyai. Katsuno was in his element: a bountiful banquet of Chinese food, a plentiful supply of beverages, mostly alcoholic, and a venue to display his command of Chinese. He thanked everyone for joining in the celebration of the new consulate that he was proud to be opening. He spoke in platitudes about the history of Japan's relations with Thailand, and he talked about his many years of service as a consul in China. Standing next to Katsuno and interpreting his speech was Nishino Junjirō who had been the interpreter at the morning opening ceremony. Katsuno finished by leading a toast, and the party began.

Katsuno spent much of his time moving from table to table chatting with guests. But he spent the greater part of his time around the tables of his local Chinese guests, chatting and bantering in Chinese and enjoying the conviviality of the evening. He was also pleased that all but one of the invited Hādyai merchants had come to the celebration. Interpreter Nishino was amused that although the celebration was an international affair, no English was used, a fact that did not encumber the British consul as he was fluent in Thai.

Following the success of his grand party and the attendance of the merchants from Hādyai, Katsuno was convinced that the fear and worry in the legation about anti-Japanese feeling in southern Thailand was unfounded. Since his arrival in Songkhla, he had run into no obstructions, not even from the merchants in Hādyai, a supposed Chinese den of anti-Japanese sentiment. This conviction was further strengthened when a few days after the party, the 35th merchant suddenly appeared at the consulate.

⁵¹ Hatakeyama, p. 20.

⁵² Hatakeyama, p. 19.

⁵³ Samōsawn Jangwat Songkhla (สโมสรจังหวัดสงขลา).

⁵⁴ Læm Samilā (แหลมสมิหลา).

⁵⁵ Information about Katsuno's celebration party from Hatakeyama, p. 20; Nishino interview, 26 May 1989.

⁵⁶ Alan Trevor Oldham, posted to Thailand (then called Siam) in 1929.

He had been out of town, and he had come to apologize to the consul for having missed his celebration.⁵⁷

Confident that the strong anti-Japanese sentiment supposedly prevailing in Hādyai was exaggerated, that the cooperation he had received from the local Chinese merchants and their attendance at the celebration of the new consulate showed their willingness to do business, Katsuno set about urging the local representatives of Japanese companies to open direct contacts with local merchants. He told Mitsui to look for a better Hādyai office, to stop hesitating and get a place in town.⁵⁸ To the Mitsubishi people he told them to stop worrying, to go ahead and buy up rice directly from the local merchants.⁵⁹ Years later, while reminiscing, Katsuno commented that perhaps the alleged anti-Japanese feeling in Hādyai had been a fabrication of the local Taiwanese merchants.⁶⁰ Although ethnically Chinese and native speakers of the language, these merchants were citizens of the Japanese Empire, which had controlled Taiwan since 1895. They had long acted as middlemen for Japanese companies purchasing raw materials in southern Thailand. The Taiwanese were small operators; Japan did not buy much from south Thailand. But by the late 1930s, Japan's need for raw materials had grown enormously. Because of this, Mitsui decided to open its own office in Hādyai to facilitate the purchasing of rubber, tin and other raw materials in the quantities needed. Unable to speak the local languages, Mitsui naturally turned to the local Japanese-speaking Taiwanese merchants who could communicate with the local people. Katsuno speculated that these merchants, wanting to protect their own interests, told Mitsui that the local Chinese business community was anti-Japanese and would not do business. Worried about anti-Japanese sentiment, and not able to communicate with the local Chinese directly, Mitsui continued to rely on the Taiwanese merchants as middlemen.

Along with urging Japanese companies to do business directly with local merchants, Katsuno continued cultivating connections in the local Chinese community. Businessmen and community leaders were always welcome at the consulate. At the same time Katsuno frequented Hādyai's eateries and drinking establishments. The local Chinese had a long-standing custom of meeting each morning in the tea houses and restaurants of the various ethnic groups. Meetings over breakfast⁶¹ were a sort of social courtesy when the local Chinese businessmen took the opportunity to exchange information and do business deals. Katsuno began using the opportunity of these breakfasts to drop in and introduce himself to the Hādyai business community.⁶²

⁵⁷ Hatakeyama, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Around the time Katsuno was encouraging Mitsui to move into better quarters, a local German businessman named Schreiber happened to approach him about selling property. Schreiber owned a five-acre piece of land in Hādyai, and he wondered if Katsuno might know of an interested buyer. Katsuno immediately contacted Mitsui and got them to buy the property. (Hatakeyama, pp. 20–21)

⁵⁹ Hatakeyama, p. 20. Nishimaki also concurred that Katsuno "smoothed out relations with the local Chinese." (Nishimaki interview, 14 May 1987)

⁶⁰ Comment on Taiwanese in Katsuno interview, 28 March 1983. He expressed the same thought in Hatakeyama p. 20.

⁶¹ These were known as "*yumcha*" meetings. (Huáng letter dated 22 Jul 1991)

⁶² Huáng letter dated 22 Jul 1991.

Katsuno enjoyed socializing with the local Chinese. He joined in their festivals and prayed at their temples.⁶³ They were impressed not only by his ability to speak the language but also with his gift for singing Chinese songs, which he would frequently launch into after eating and drinking at one of the local restaurants. Excursions to Hādyaï with other members of the consulate staff, who arrived over the course of 1941, became a regular pastime. After plenty of food and drink and the accompanying conviviality, Katsuno would begin to sing. It was not unusual for him to go over to the window and sing out into the evening. In the street a crowd of passers-by would gather, and Katsuno would revel in their wonderment that this was a Japanese, and the Japanese consul no less, singing Chinese songs.⁶⁴ Through his ability to speak and sing in Chinese, his socializing and participation in their festivities, Katsuno was able to impart a feeling of affinity with the local Chinese. The degree that he succeeded in imparting this feeling would be amply demonstrated years later following Japan's defeat in 1945, when Chinese businessmen in Hādyaï would come to the rescue of a distressed Japanese consulate in Songkhla.

Espionage and Gathering Intelligence

Among the consul's duties was working to improve relations between Japanese and the local community and helping the Japanese businesses operating in his jurisdiction, but the primary reason for establishing the Songkhla consulate was to collect intelligence for the military. Not long after the consulate had opened, Katsuno received the first two members of his staff. One was Kashiwabara Tsuyoshi, a man some years older than Katsuno. He was a long-time resident in Thailand and formerly a teacher at the Japanese school in Bangkok. He had been hired locally by the Japanese legation to work at the Songkhla consulate. He went down to help Katsuno with administrative tasks, correspondence and communications. The other arrival was William (Billy) Tobina, the son of an American father and Thai mother. He was in his mid-thirties, had lived his entire life in Thailand, and had been working for a Thai-language newspaper, *Khāu-phāp*,⁶⁵ that was funded by the Japanese legation. He later moved over to work for the legation. Then in the spring of 1941 when the consulate was opened in Songkhla, he was sent there to be a clerk-typist and assistant to Kashiwabara. He spoke Thai and English, but no Japanese.⁶⁶

Following the arrival of these two staff members, Katsuno set out on a tour of inspection of the region under his jurisdiction. Officially Katsuno did not become consul at Songkhla until 24 June 1941, the date of his imperial letter of assignment.⁶⁷ From February 1941 until that date, his official posting was to the consulate-general at Saigon but on dispatch to the legation in Bangkok. In reality of course, Katsuno had functioned as consul since his arrival in Songkhla in mid-March. His consulate's

⁶³ Huáng letter dated 22 Jul 1991.

⁶⁴ Katsuno interview, 26 Mar 1983; Nishimaki interview, 30 Mar 1983. Other former consulate staff members whom the author interviewed also commented on Katsuno's fondness for singing Chinese songs.

⁶⁵ פתח־קוֹפֶה (*News & Photos*).

⁶⁶ Information on Kashiwabara and Tobina from Nishimaki interview, 14 May 1987; Nishino interview, 26 May 1989.

⁶⁷ Katsuno 1982 reminiscence; Hatakeyama, p. 21.

jurisdiction extended from Chumphon and Ranong down to the Thai-Malay border. His tour of inspection was to acquaint himself with the topography and routes of communication in the Thai-Malay border region. He traveled down to Pattani where the Nankon Company⁶⁸ had an office. The company representative there was a man named Ishibashi, who, like Katsuno, was a *yon-dan* kendo swordsman. Also living in Pattani was a family named Nagano. The family's son had been born there and could speak the local Pattani-Malay dialect. From Pattani Katsuno headed further down the coast to Narathiwat where the Daidō Trading Company⁶⁹ maintained a representative office, and where lived a doctor Shiba Gi'ichi. Years earlier, after graduating from Kansai Gakuin Middle School, Shiba had left Japan to find opportunities in the Southern Seas, living first in Singapore and Malaya before eventually moving to Thailand where it was possible to purchase a medical practice. Shiba had kept in touch with Japanese living in Malaya from whom he obtained information about conditions south of the border.⁷⁰

From his talks with these local Japanese and from his own observations, Katsuno soon realized that there was only one road into Malaya from this southeastern-most part of peninsular Thailand. This ran from Pattani through Yala town and Betong village. It was a very poor road, cut by numerous rivers, many unbridged; and for much of its length it was hardly more than a wide trail. The only other routes were mere jungle paths, nothing more than “elephant trails” as Katsuno termed them. It was quite apparent why the route through Songkhla and Hādyaï was so important to the military. It was the only good road and the only way to move an army quickly down to Malaya.

This tour of inspection acquainted him with an important part of his region, but Katsuno could not fill his time with such “tours” around the countryside. The south was sparsely populated, and wherever he went, his presence was noted. Too much time spent out inspecting could only cause suspicions about his activities. Katsuno began spending more time talking with the Chinese in Songkhla and Hādyaï, eating and drinking together and building up relations with a few. The consulate door was always open to them, to come in, relax, drink, and talk. But the most frequent visitors at the consulate were the local Japanese. Dr. Seto was one. According to son Masao, the consul and his father got together almost daily, often times at the Seto residence.⁷¹ In this manner the next several months passed until July when five more people joined the consulate staff.

One of the new arrivals was Nishimaki Torao. He had passed the consular exam and entered the foreign service in the spring of 1940. The Songkhla assignment was his first posting overseas. He would be the chief secretary and number-two man on the staff charged with the general affairs, administration and communications of the consulate. Accompanying Nishimaki was Ōzone Yoshihiko, a major in the Army, who was going by the alias Gotō Saburō. Both men took up posts as

⁶⁸ Nankon Kōshi (南昆公司).

⁶⁹ Daidō Bōeki Kabushiki-kaisha (大同貿易株式会社).

⁷⁰ Information about Katsuno's reconnoiter to the Malay border from Hatakeyama, pp. 21–22.

⁷¹ Seto interview, 8 Dec 1983.

consular staff, but only Nishimaki handled consular work.⁷² Ōzone, as Mr. Gotō, had been assigned to the consulate by the Army, and his job was to collect intelligence to be sent back to Southern Army headquarters in Saigon. Although a military officer, Ōzone was a mild-mannered slightly chubby man with round-rimmed glasses and hair parted down the center. He played his civilian role well, easily fooling the military people who periodically visited Songkhla.⁷³

These two new arrivals were soon followed by another officer, Major Kuboki, an Army Air Corps pilot, who arrived as a clerk named Ishii Tarō, but who, like Ōzone, was an intelligence officer. Unlike Ōzone, however, Kuboki was a thin, solid man with a tense character who tended to let his true occupation show through his civilian guise.⁷⁴

Next came two young men who arrived together, Iwasaki Yōji and Itō Keisuke. Both were graduates of Ōkawa *Juku*, a school organized in 1938 by Professor Ōkawa Shūmei and which had connections with and funding from *Mantetsu*⁷⁵ (the South Manchuria Railroad Company) and the Army's Imperial General Staff Office. The school trained young men for work overseas, the curriculum stressing foreign languages and the study of foreign cultures and international relations. Many of the school's graduates were hired by the foreign service.

At the school Iwasaki had taken up Thai studies. In May 1940, following graduation, he was sent to the Japanese legation in Bangkok where he continued his Thai language study, participating in activities with students at Wachirawut prep school and Thammasat University, and living for a time with a Thai family. In July 1941 Iwasaki was sent down to Songkhla. Then nineteen years old, Iwasaki impressed everyone with his splendid voice and ability to sing popular Thai songs. He was a particular hit with the students at the women's teacher-training school next door to the consulate, and Katsuno recalled with amusement how Iwasaki's singing could interfere with studies as the students turned their ears and eyes toward the consulate and Iwasaki's singing and away from their lectures. Iwasaki worked as the consulate's interpreter, but his job turned out to be rather limited. Katsuno made him interpreter only for the official consulate staff, which meant for the consul and Nishimaki, the chief secretary; and his work was confined largely to social events and occasions when the consul had visits with local Thai officials. Lack of access to Iwasaki's Thai language skill perturbed the two majors. Their intelligence gathering was greatly handicapped by their inability to communicate with the Thais. But Katsuno excluded Iwasaki from intelligence work, both his and that of the two majors. The one innocuous task he assigned Iwasaki was listening to the Thai radio station's weather forecast that was broadcasted every morning and evening.⁷⁶

Itō Keisuke had studied the Dutch East Indies and Malay language. He had taken a particular interest in Southeast Asian civilizations and had entered Ōkawa *Juku* in the hopes of ultimately going

⁷² Nishimaki interview, 14 May 1987.

⁷³ Ōzone description from Hatakeyama, p. 24; Nishimaki interview, 25 Jul 1988; Itō interview, 12 May 1988.

⁷⁴ Kuboki description from Nishimaki interview 25 Jul 1988; Itō interview, 12 May 1988.

⁷⁵ 満鉄 (南満洲鉄道株式会社 [Minami Manshū Tetsudō Kabushiki-kaisha]).

⁷⁶ Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989; Iwasaki letter dated 25 Feb 1989.

to Java. Itō graduated in the spring of 1941, was hired by the foreign service, and in July was sent to Bangkok, likely because the Dutch government in Batavia had become extremely reluctant to let Japanese enter the colony. Probably due to his lack of knowledge about Thailand, Itō was assigned no particular task at the legation and spent nearly a fortnight enjoying Bangkok with Ōkawa *Juku* friends working in the Thai capital. He had one memorable experience that years later he recalled with some humor. On arriving in Bangkok, he had taken a room at the Thailand Hotel which, to a young man who had spent nearly his entire life in Japan's Northeast, the *Tōhoku* Region, and who was on his first venture abroad, had the finest facilities imaginable. But it was also quite beyond his means, and in a matter of days, Itō had spent practically all of his money. When he approached Asada about his plight, the consul-general scolded him sharply, telling him to check out immediately and move into the legation compound. After nearly two weeks in Bangkok, Itō was assigned to the consulate in Songkhla where it was thought his knowledge of Malay could be of some use. This proved a false expectation however. Unlike Iwasaki who had a year's extra language training in Thailand, Itō had never used his Malay outside of school. Worse still, the Pattani-Malay dialect spoken in southern Thailand was totally unlike anything he had studied. Reflecting back on his time in Songkhla, Itō said that not long after his arrival at the consulate, Katsuno told him to go to Hādai and try out his Malay. Reminiscing on that experience, Itō chuckled, "I couldn't understand anything they said. I reported this quite frankly to Mr. Katsuno, and after that he pretty well gave up expecting anything from my Malay language."⁷⁷

By the end of August 1941, five months after the consulate had opened, eight people were on the staff; only two, Katsuno and Nishimaki, were regular foreign service officers. In addition, periodic visitors, usually civilian-clad military people, appeared at the consulate. They came to reconnoiter, sent by different organizations affiliated with the military. Members of the local Japanese community also dropped in at the consulate, some of them regularly. The coming and going of numerous people at the consulate gave the local Thais the impression of a staff rather larger than actually existed. When compared with a single Englishman, Alan Oldham, manning the British consulate, which was only about half a kilometer up the road from its Japanese counterpart, the Japanese consulate could only be viewed locally as quite overstaffed.

Intelligence gathering at the consulate was carried out largely by the consul, Katsuno, and the two majors, Ōzone (alias Gotō) and Kuboki (alias Ishii). But the three did not coordinate their efforts. Katsuno was under Asada in Bangkok while Ōzone and Kuboki were responsible to offices at Southern Army HQ in Saigon. Although there was some mutual assisting and comparing of notes, a natural result of being together in the same office, there was no division of responsibility. Each gathered and collated his information and passed it on to the office each was responsible to. Reminiscing about those days, Katsuno had to conclude that the consulate's intelligence gathering system had not been a particularly good one. He was quite disparaging of the work done by the two majors.

⁷⁷ Itō interview, 22 Mar 1983.

Ōzone and Kuboki could speak no foreign languages; they only knew Japanese. They seldom left the office and had to depend totally on the information they received from the local Japanese. Sometimes they'd go for a bus ride or something and note the things they could see along the way. But what kind of information can you get that way? How can you collect intelligence if you can't speak to the people? It's impossible. It was ridiculous. But they worked hard, sitting all day long at their desks, drawing maps and collating reports that they sent to Saigon.⁷⁸

Itō helped Ōzone in his work. Following the failure of his Malay language, he had no particular task to do, so Katsuno told him to assist the major. Itō described some of their intelligence-gathering activities. One was a trip he took with Ōzone down to Pattani.

I went out with Ōzone, and what we did was all a rather amateurish way of collecting information. Sometimes we traveled by bus; at other times we had locally hired transportation. We would start from one place and go until we reached another place. Along the way I had to keep a record of how much distance there was to a bridge; what kind of bridge it was; how wide the road was. I had to note down all this sort of information about the highway communications system. We didn't get anything from the local people, only from what we could see and what the local Japanese told us.⁷⁹

Among the local Japanese they met was the Nagano family living in Pattani whom Katsuno had met on his reconnoiter of the area. The family's Pattani-Malay speaking son, who was around Itō's age, helped Ōzone collect information about the border area.⁸⁰

On another occasion Itō and Ōzone took a train quite a distance north of Hādai where they checked out an airfield. Itō could not recall the location, but from the station they took a car, then changed to a trishaw. The airfield was small, little more than a flat open area. The two men left the trishaw and began traversing the field. They soon noticed that several Thai policemen were following them around the field. The two continued on around and back to where they had left the trishaw, got back in, and headed back to where the awaiting car had dropped them off. The police made no effort to stop them or to follow them when they left the area. That was also the only time that Itō experienced being openly followed by the police. Sometimes when riding on the bus, police would be sitting nearby, and the consulate people had the feeling of being watched. But there was never any direct interference in or obstruction of their intelligence work. To be sure, their work was low key, limited to collecting the information they could gather via everyday activities like riding the bus.⁸¹

Ōzone tasked Itō with gathering information on where and how many vehicles were in Songkhla.

⁷⁸ From Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983.

⁷⁹ From Itō interview, 22 Mar 1983.

⁸⁰ Itō interviews, 22 Mar 1983, 12 Apr 1988, 1 Aug 1988. After war started, Itō would go to Malaya to join the *Fujiwara Kikan* group (see p. 46) where he would again meet the Nagano son who had also joined that organization.

⁸¹ Itō interview, 22 Mar 1983.

Another of his tasks was walking out to the beach to check the height of the waves and direction of the wind which he then reported to Ōzone. Itō did this daily for three and a half months, right up until the war broke out.⁸² This sort of information gathering that Ōzone carried on with Itō's help was the sort of intelligence work that Katsuno scoffed at.

While discrediting the work of his two military colleagues, Katsuno was unreserved in rating his information as the only worthwhile intelligence gathered by the consulate. His primary sources were a number of local Chinese with whom he had developed a rapport. In Katsuno's view, these locals were the only source available to the consulate for obtaining substantial intelligence. They could move around the country freely without attracting suspicion. They had contacts in Malaya and Singapore, and could move back and forth over the border without difficulty. One such local was a businessman who operated an emporium dealing in imported goods and high-quality Chinese merchandise. Of Fujian ancestry, like Katsuno he was fluent in Mandarin Chinese and English, and in the course of his business, he regularly traveled back and forth over the border.⁸³

Two brothers, also of Fujian background, were another contact. One went by his Chinese name, which the Japanese pronounced Ryō Bunjin.⁸⁴ He had an older brother who went by his Thai name, Jinda Udomakson.⁸⁵ Jinda in particular got along well with Katsuno, although it was more for business reasons than for providing intelligence. Early into his tenure as consul in Songkhla, Katsuno learned that a Chinese businessman named Jinda was holding a large quantity of rice that he wanted to sell. Katsuno got in contact with him, then arranged a meeting with the Mitsui agent in Hādai who purchased the rice. Thereafter Jinda's business dealings with the Japanese developed and continued throughout the war. Jinda had been educated in Penang and spoke English. He and his brother had friends and associates in Penang and Singapore as well as other parts of Malaya. From a coded message Katsuno sent to the foreign minister,⁸⁶ it is apparent that prior to the outbreak of war in December, Jinda and his brother helped Katsuno make contact with a Chinese in Singapore. Jinda also developed a friendship with the consulate's chief secretary, Nishimaki.⁸⁷

As proof supporting the caliber of the information his sources provided, Katsuno cited one case. One of his Chinese contacts had been down in Malaya. After returning he came to the consulate and told Katsuno about a column of troops on motorcycles and tanks that had passed him between Jitra

⁸² Itō interview, 22 Mar 1983.

⁸³ Huáng letter dated 22 Jul 1991.

⁸⁴ The Chinese characters for his name were 梁文陣, pronounced Liáng Wénzhèn in Mandarin Chinese.

⁸⁵ Jinda's name and that of his brother appear in a coded message from Katsuno to Foreign Minister Tōgo dated 29 Oct 1941, message no. 33204 (held in the Foreign Ministry archives, folder A 7009-63, v. III, under シンゴラ [Shingora], p. 787). The brother's name is rendered in Chinese characters; Jinda's is in the katakana syllabary: チンダ [Chinda].

⁸⁶ Katsuno message to Tōgo dated 29 Oct 1941, message no. 33175 (in same archives folder as footnote 85, p. 788).

⁸⁷ Nishimaki interview, 14 May 1987.

Jinda's association with Katsuno and the Songkhla consulate staff was apparently exceptional because although throughout the war local Chinese businessmen dealt routinely with the Japanese military stationed in the country, after the war Jinda was the only businessman to be arrested and brought to trial for his dealings with the Japanese. In the end he was acquitted of the charges brought against him.

and Alor Star. Probing his man for more information, Katsuno said he was able to estimate the size of the force. No sources available to the others in the consulate could have discovered such information⁸⁸ (although the British in Malaya had no tanks, and what Katsuno's informant probably had seen were tracked Bren-gun carriers that the British tried out in Malaya with poor results).

While Katsuno was proud of his connections with the local Chinese and the intelligence he could collect, he also had to admit that it was not simply due to the rapport he established with his informants that brought their cooperation, but also the money he paid and the prospects for doing business with the Japanese that made possible much of the information that he got from them. The British and American freezing of Japanese assets in July 1941 had financial repercussions on the consulate. The Foreign Ministry budget tightened, and funds for espionage in Songkhla began to dry up. Katsuno resorted to using his own salary to augment funds, but it was far too little. At this point, one of Katsuno's contacts, a trusted Chinese (whose uncle in Jinan, China, Katsuno happened to have known) who on Katsuno's request had gone down to reconnoiter around Kota Bharu, suddenly appeared at the consulate. Katsuno called Ōzone to his office. The major had quite a talent for drawing, and with Katsuno interpreting, Ōzone drew up a large map of the Kota Bharu area from the information provided by the informant. It was a beautiful piece of work, Katsuno recalled. He hand carried it to Bangkok, took it over to the military attaché's office which had far more funding than did the embassy (the Japanese legation had been raised to embassy status in August 1941), and showed it to Col. Tamura Hiroshi, the military attaché, who, Katsuno said, could hardly believe his eyes. Of course he wanted that map, but Katsuno was not about to give it to him for nothing. After some bargaining the military attaché agreed to pay the consul 6000 baht for the map. With this money Katsuno could get his espionage operations up to speed again.⁸⁹

In early October a new member joined the consulate, Army Captain Inobe Jūchin. A graduate of *Nakano Gakkō*,⁹⁰ the Army's intelligence training center, Inobe, unlike the two earlier officers, went by his own name. In the middle of that same October, a provincial tennis tournament, sponsored by the Mitsui Company, took place in Songkhla. Yasuda Ei'ichi, who headed the Bangkok office of Mitsui Sempaku (Mitsui Steamship Company), and known in the Thai capital's upper society as an avid tennis player, came down to preside over the tournament and present the "Mitsui Cup" to the tournament champion. At the time, one of Mitsui's ships, the *Akibasan-maru*, lay at anchor off the Songkhla coast waiting to take on a cargo of tin and rubber. A young man who identified himself as from the consulate approached Yasuda one day to ask for his help. The consul, the young man told Yasuda, needed to make a chart of the waters off Songkhla, and he wanted Yasuda's permission to use the *Akibasan-maru* for the purpose. Yasuda knew Katsuno well; the two were on very friendly terms, so he

⁸⁸ Hatakeyama, pp. 22-23; Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983.

⁸⁹ Hatakeyama, p. 25.

⁹⁰ 中野学校, literally Nakano School, was the Army's intelligence school set up in 1938 in Tokyo's Nakano Ward.

gave his permission without hesitation.⁹¹ Unbeknownst to Yasuda, the young man he spoke with was Captain Inobe.

Accompanied by Gotō (Maj. Ōzone), Katsuno boarded the Akibasan-maru and had the captain take them out into the vicinity of Cat and Mouse islands a short distance off the Songkhla coast. With the help of crew members, Katsuno and Ōzone took measurements of the water depth and checked their readings against those shown on an oceanographic chart they had. Katsuno then had Ōzone and himself taken to Mouse Island, the larger of the two islands and lying closer to the coast, from where the major made a sketch of the beach coastline. After returning to the consulate, the two spent the night making a sketch map of Songkhla's coastline and coastal waters, showing depths and distances. Ōzone had the map taken to Bangkok and sent on to Saigon. Recalling the episode, Katsuno was sure the map had been used in preparing for the landing at Songkhla.⁹² Yasuda too, in his recollections, was certain that the information they had gathered about the waters off Songkhla had been used later by the invasion fleet.⁹³

One observation about Songkhla's coastline that any military observer would have noted was that no defensive positions existed along the beach, and the closest Thai army units were the two battalions stationed at Camp Suantun⁹⁴ about six kilometers (four miles) south of Songkhla on a side road that branched off the main highway running between Songkhla and Hādyaï. Another battalion was stationed at the army camp at Khaw Hong⁹⁵ just outside of Hādyaï around 30 kilometers (18.5 miles) southwest of Songkhla. The Japanese could expect no opposition at the coast when their forces landed. That could only come from the British in Malay were they to move forces pre-emptively into Thailand and up to Songkhla prior to a Japanese landing. But that would violate Thailand's sovereignty and its declared neutrality which the British appeared reluctant to do. The only factor certain to impede landing operations was the weather.

With the coming of October, the monsoon began to change bringing rougher surf along the peninsular east coast. The international climate had grown more tense with the continued deadlock in negotiations between Japan and the United States. The Thai authorities began keeping a closer vigil on the consulate. At the end of October, Maj. Fujiwara Iwaichi came to Songkhla. He headed his namesake *Fujiwara Kikan* group (better known as the *F-Kikan*) that was under the military attaché's office in Bangkok. The group had been set up to propagandize and organize anti-British activity among the Asian populations (especially the Indians) in Malaya. Fujiwara was in civilian attire and carried diplomatic papers identifying him as Mr. Yamashita. The *F-Kikan* had placed a number of its agents in Japanese companies working in Hādyaï, Pattani and other towns in the far south. Fujiwara had come down

⁹¹ Yasuda interview, 17 Feb 1983.

⁹² Hatakeyama, pp. 25–26.

⁹³ Yasuda interview, 17 Feb 1983.

⁹⁴ Khāi Suantūn (ค่ายสวนตุน) where the 41st Infantry and 13th Artillery battalions were stationed.

⁹⁵ The camp was located along the Songkhla-Hādyaï highway. The backdrop overlooking the camp was Khaw Hong mountain (Khao Khaw Hong [เขาคอหงษ์]). The 5th Infantry Battalion was stationed here.

to make a personal inspection of the situation along the Malay border. He had been followed by Thai agents all the way from Bangkok, and on arriving in Songkhla, he took the precaution of leaving his passport and other sensitive documents in the safe at the consulate. That was a wise decision because later that day while having drinks with Katsuno, his room at the Songkhla Railroad Hotel was broken into and his travel bag stolen. It could have been thieves, but everyone at the consulate was sure it had been the work of Thai government agents or the police. That evening Katsuno gave a dinner for Fujiwara. All the Japanese at the consulate took part, drinking heavily, especially Katsuno and Fujiwara. Although having arrived "incognito," it was no secret among the consulate staff who Mr. Yamashita was or what his work was in Thailand. One staff member, Itō Keisuke, was particularly interested in the work of the *F-Kikan*. He wanted to go south to be among the Malay people where his language training could be of some use, and during the party he told Fujiwara that he very much wanted to join the major's organization. Fujiwara was receptive. He would need more people, he told Itō, once they had begun their work in Malaya.

As the party progressed, the consul and his guest grew increasingly drunk. Katsuno boasted of his swordsmanship, drawing out a sword he kept at the consulate. Fujiwara asked to see it. Both being exceedingly drunk, Katsuno handed the sword over blade first which Fujiwara grasped cutting his hand. The next day Mr. Yamashita left for the Malay border area with a bandaged hand.⁹⁶

The Invasion

With November the northeast monsoon winds blew strongly over Songkhla bringing on the rainy season. International tension continued to rise. Outside the consulate police and even military patrols began appearing.⁹⁷ Unlike previously, the Thais were no longer trying to be discreet in their surveillance; they wanted the Japanese to know they were being watched. Intelligence work at the consulate had to be curtailed and greater precautions taken. On the 26th a telegram arrived from Ambassador Tsubokami telling Katsuno to come up to Bangkok immediately. The next morning he caught the train at Hādai and arrived at the embassy the following morning, November 28th. There he was informed that Asada Shunsuke, the consul-general, who had been called to Tokyo for consultation, was expected to return shortly with a secret and most important message. A plane that had departed from Japan a few days earlier was expected at Don Muang that day. It was possible Asada would be on it, so Katsuno accompanied Amada out to the airport to meet him. The plane arrived as scheduled, but Asada was not aboard.

The next day, the 29th, while waiting, a telegram arrived from the consulate in Songkhla. It was from Gotō reporting the movement of seven Thai warships around Songkhla. Something seemed to be afoot, and Gotō's message asked the consul to return to Songkhla. Was something developing down there?

⁹⁶ Information about Fujiwara's visit to Songkhla from Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Itō interview, 1 Aug 1988.

⁹⁷ The narration of events in the next paragraphs is from Hatakeyama, p. 110; Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Katsuno 1982 reminiscence.

Was it a Thai reaction to the increasing international tension? Would it be better to wait for Asada? Or should Katsuno return to Songkhla as the telegram requested? No one knew for certain when Asada would arrive. Finally after more waiting and some discussion with Amada, it was decided that Katsuno should return to Songkhla. He caught the afternoon express on the 30th and started back. A few hours later, aboard the train, Katsuno received a telegram. It was from the ambassador and in plain (uncoded) text simply told him to return at once. Checking on trains going up to Bangkok, Katsuno found there were none until the next day. The best place for him to spend the night was at Huahin, and he disembarked there. By now a second telegram with the same message had reached him.

Katsuno found the Huahin Railroad Hotel luxurious and in beautiful surroundings which helped him pass a pleasant night. The next day, December 1st, he caught the regular train going to Bangkok and did not get into Hualamphong Station until around eight o'clock in the evening. An embassy car was waiting and took him directly to the ambassador's residence on Phetburi Road (now the Indonesian Embassy). With the ambassador was Asada who had arrived in Bangkok earlier that day. Katsuno now heard for the first time from Asada that Japan was intent on going to war and that just before Japanese forces began advancing into Thailand, the ambassador was to begin negotiations with the Thai government to allow the passage of these forces through Thai territory and prevent the outbreak of fighting between the two countries. The exact time Japan would commence war was uncertain, but Asada had heard that it would be on the 5th or 8th of December.⁹⁸ There was talk of getting Songkhla's Japanese civilians out of town along with the non-military staff at the consulate, but Katsuno rejected the idea. He pointed out that there was no place down there for them to flee to. And the Japanese were not only in Songkhla; they were in Hadyai and other parts of the south. Besides, such an evacuation effort could only attract the attention of the Thai authorities and perhaps jeopardize Japanese war plans. In the end no attempt was made to evacuate Japanese civilians in Songkhla or any other part of southern Thailand as was undertaken in Bangkok on the eve of the invasion.

The next morning, December 2nd, as Katsuno was about to leave the embassy to return south, Colonel Tamura, the military attaché, called him into another room. In the room was Major Fujiwara; near him were three small diplomatic trunks.

"These came from headquarters in Saigon," Tamura told Katsuno, indicating the trunks. "They'd like you to take them along to Songkhla."⁹⁹

"From Saigon? What's in them?" Katsuno asked.

"One contains a radio," he was told.

"A radio?" Katsuno replied in delighted surprise. The consulate's only means of communicating with Bangkok was through the Thai telegraph office in the Songkhla post office. Now they would have a

⁹⁸ Asada reminiscence, in *Minnami*, Jun 1954, part 3/section 5, p. 3; Batson, p. 60. Katsuno in his reminiscence four decades later recalled three dates being mentioned: the 5th, 8th or 15th of December. But Asada in his 1954 reminiscence mentions only the two dates.

⁹⁹ Dialogue related in Hatakeyama, p. 111 (this author's translation).

radio. He knew that Ōzone and Kuboki would be delighted too.

“It’s for communicating with the invasion fleet as it approaches Songkhla,” Tamura informed him. “Please tell this to Major Ōzone.”

“What’s in the other trunks?”

“One has a machine gun, and the other ammunition and hand grenades.”

These words also surprised Katsuno. What were such weapons at a consulate of the Foreign Ministry to be used for? In answer he was told that the situation could become very dangerous for the consulate staff and the Japanese in Songkhla. Until Japanese forces arrived, they might have to defend themselves.

Katsuno understood. He would take the three trunks along. Things were developing just as he had imagined back in February when he talked with his friend Ushijima. The bullets were about to start flying.

Along with the radio, Saigon HQ had also dispatched a radio operator.¹⁰⁰ He would go with Katsuno. The operator took the trunk containing the radio while two young men, both Ōkawa *Juku* graduates working at the embassy, helped carry the other two trunks to the train station.

Around three o’clock in the afternoon of December 3rd the train pulled into Hādya Station. Ōzone and Kuboki, informed of Katsuno’s arrival, were waiting on the platform. Katsuno could see them—tense, slender Kuboki looking for the consul, his eyes scanning the passing train windows, and the slightly chubby Ōzone looking down at the platform and tapping it with the toe of his shoe. Katsuno got the three trunks off the train. The two majors of course were curious to know what they contained. Katsuno only told them to get the trunks to the car. He knew he had to tell them as quickly as possible about the critical situation. The drive to Songkhla would take time. He decided to go over to the Mitsui office. They could talk safely there. Mon, the consulate driver, remembered years later his curiosity as he saw those three trunks brought out of the station and put into the trunk of the consulate’s car. From the way they were being carried, they were obviously filled with something heavy.¹⁰¹

Katsuno along with Ōzone, Kuboki and the radio operator got into the car, and the consul told Mon to drive over to Mitsui’s office. This was an impressive building on a spacious piece of land that Mitsui had purchased the previous spring from a German expatriate.¹⁰² At the office Katsuno took the three men to a separate room, told them what was in the trunks and what he had heard from Asada at the ambassador’s residence. On hearing a radio was in one of the trunks, the two majors smiled. Then when Katsuno told them that war was about to begin and the army would be landing at Songkhla, a happiness filled with relief came over the two officers. All their months of work were about to be fulfilled. But time was incredibly short. The army could be landing in as little as two days.

The three arrived at the consulate, and with the help of other staff members, carried the three trunks into an inner room. Everyone was eager to see the radio, and it was removed from its trunk straight-

¹⁰⁰ The narration of events in the next paragraphs is from Hatakeyama, pp. 111–112; Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Katsuno 1982 reminiscence.

¹⁰¹ Mon Jarcensin interview, 15 Sep 1983.

¹⁰² See footnote 58.

away. But the smiles of glee soon began to fade. The radio had no battery inside. The other trunks were opened and emptied, but there was no battery. Smiles had now turned to frowns of consternation. How could Saigon have forgotten the battery? Such an oversight was beyond incredible. Kuboki, with his rather quick temper, was furious. Ōzone looked at the radio operator.

“You didn’t pack this, I suppose,” he said rhetorically.

“No sir. It was packed at Saigon army headquarters and sent directly to the embassy. It was never in my hands.”

Looking again at the radio, Ōzone moaned, “How can you win a war when you do something like this?”¹⁰³

Without a battery the machine was useless. An urgent message for a battery was telegraphed to Bangkok although everyone realized that it would be impossible to get one down to the consulate before war broke out. They tried dry-cell batteries, a car battery, but without success. The radio required a special military battery. Without the radio, they would not be able to communicate with the approaching fleet. The consulate would not know for sure when the invasion would begin.

With no radio, there was no need for the radio operator. “There’s nothing for you to do down here,” Katsuno told the soldier. “We all thank you for your help, but it would be better for you to get on back to Saigon.”¹⁰⁴

That evening tension ran high at the consulate as the staff began all-night vigils that would continue until the invasion.¹⁰⁵ The next day would be the 4th; in a little over 24 hours, the Japanese army could be landing. Major Ōzone fretted. In November he had been called to Southern Army headquarters in Saigon where he had received secret instructions. These included collecting vehicles prior to an invasion and having them at the beach for use by a special spearhead detachment¹⁰⁶ that was to move out as rapidly as possible toward the south and seize the long bridge spanning the Perak River in Malaya. Nishimaki and Itō as well as Katsuno knew Ōzone had been charged with this task, but in recalling events, they could not see how it would have been possible for the major to have fulfilled his instructions. For

¹⁰³ Dialogue related in Hatakeyama, p. 112 (this author’s translation). In his 1982 reminiscence, Katsuno wrote that it was a grim-faced Nishimaki who wondered aloud how one could win a war when doing “something like this.”

¹⁰⁴ The episode about the radio and no battery is related in Hatakeyama, p. 112; and in Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983. Katsuno also wrote about it in his 1982 reminiscence. In a reminiscence written in 1954, Asada Shunsuke mentioned that during a stay at the Songkhla consulate around New Year’s of 1942, he learned that at the time the army landing took place, the wireless equipment provided to the consulate was inoperable. (in *Minami*, Oct 1954, part 4/section 8, p. 7; also Batson, p. 86) The usually mentioned reason for the consulate’s failure to communicate with the approaching Japanese invasion force was because during that intense time, Maj. Ōzone is said to have burned the codebook out of fear that it might fall into British hands were they to invade southern Thailand before the Japanese army landed. *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 221, attributes this reason to a memo written by Col. Tsuji Masanobu. Tsuji also mentioned Ōzone’s supposed hasty destruction of the codebook in his book on the Malaya invasion (Tsuji, p. 95). But in a 10 Apr 1983 interview, Katsuno stated that the codebook had not been burned or otherwise destroyed, that it remained safely protected in the consulate safe. The failure to communicate had been due to the lack of a battery for the radio.

¹⁰⁵ The narration of events in the following paragraphs is from Hatakeyama, pp. 112–113; Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Katsuno 1982 reminiscence; Nishimaki interview, 14 May 1987; Itō interview, 12 May 1988.

¹⁰⁶ *Tokubetsu tosshin-tai* (特別突進隊). Tsuji, p. 68, says that Ōzone had been called to Saigon and instructed to have vehicles at the beach for the spearhead detachment. Also *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 218.

one thing, there were not many vehicles in Songkhla. High-ranking government officials had some; the police had some; the wealthier citizens and merchants in town had cars and trucks. But how could Ôzone himself, on short notice, get most of the town's vehicles to the beach? It was an incredible task, ridiculous in retrospect, but one he had received from higher command in Saigon. With the invasion imminent, Ôzone searched for a way to carry out his instructions. The consulate was now under constant Thai surveillance, and the staff had little doubt that when outside the consulate, their movements were being watched by plain-clothes detectives. The only possible way Ôzone could see of fulfilling the task was to contact some of the local Japanese, tell them to organize others and be ready to find vehicles and take them to the beach. Ôzone also contemplated lighting a signal fire atop Tangkuan Hill,¹⁰⁷ the higher of two forested hills not far from the consulate. Possibly along with getting vehicles, he had been instructed to prepare a signal fire. Perhaps the Japanese command was concerned that the Thais might turn off the Songkhla lighthouse atop the hill. Sitting together in the consulate, Ôzone mentioned to Nishimaki his idea of asking the local Japanese to help collect vehicles. Nishimaki recommended against it. They might succeed in collecting a few vehicles here and there, but they could never get the large number that the army expected. Itô too remembered the car scheme.

Ôzone tried to collect information about the location of vehicles, where you could find a car or truck or bus, something like that. But it was a most difficult task. First off, you needed money to get those vehicles. Moreover, it was quite impossible to get all those cars before the landing. Collecting them up ahead of time would have indicated that something was going to happen.¹⁰⁸

Faced with an all but impossible task and unable to communicate with the fleet, Ôzone gave up trying to get vehicles to the beach. The idea of lighting a signal fire was likewise abandoned.

On December 4th a telegram arrived from the embassy. It informed Katsuno that the new Japanese consul-general to Singapore, Okamoto Suemasa, was departing Bangkok by international express train for Singapore and would be passing through Hādyai tomorrow afternoon, the 5th. Katsuno read the telegram and wondered. Would they be sending the new consul-general down this way if there was to be an invasion on the 5th? The telegram also told him that the consul-general would be accompanied by someone bringing an important document for the consul.

December 5th dawned with no outbreak of war. Too busy to go to Hādyai to meet Okamoto, Katsuno told Ôzone to go greet the consul-general and bring back the person carrying the important document. When the train pulled into Hādyai station, a young man accompanying the consul-general got off the train. He was Tsukamoto Masao, a student attaché studying Thai language in Bangkok. He had accompanied Okamoto from Bangkok to serve as his interpreter and also to carry the important document. Tsukamoto did not know what it was, but on leaving Bangkok, he had been handed an

¹⁰⁷ Khao Tangkuan (เขาตั้งกวาน).

¹⁰⁸ From Itô interview, 12 May 1988.

envelope and simply told that it contained a very important document that had to be delivered directly to Mr. Katsuno, the consul in Songkhla. Tsukamoto put the envelope inside his shirt down under his belt and left it there until he reached Songkhla. After the train carrying Okamoto departed for Malay and Singapore, Tsukamoto went with Ōzone to Songkhla. At the consulate he handed the envelope over to Katusno who took it to his office, opened it, and took out a new code book.¹⁰⁹ Katsuno locked the book away in his office safe. Without the radio, it too was useless.

Tsukamoto arrived in Songkhla intending to stay for a while. His school's winter vacation had begun, and he wanted to travel around the area. But Katsuno ordered him to return to Bangkok immediately. Tsukamoto was surprised and unhappy. The trip from Bangkok had been long, in time and distance, and he did not relish the thought of enduring it again without at least a few days in Songkhla to relax. But Katsuno shouted at Tsukamoto, saying he had to return to Bangkok, had to return tomorrow on the morning international express. That train ran only twice a week. Were he to miss tomorrow's train, he would have to wait several days for the next one. Katsuno was adamant. Tsukamoto had to be on tomorrow's train.

Tsukamoto could see that the situation at the consulate was not normal. Everyone was hustling about doing one task or another. No one paid any attention to him. Usually there would be some sort of welcome with some food and drink for a visitor coming all the way from Bangkok. Instead he was being ordered to leave immediately. Definitely the situation was not normal; something was wrong. Meanwhile outside a torrential monsoon rain had begun falling.

December 6th came. After spending the night at the Songkhla Railway Hotel, Tsukamoto left for Hādyai and caught the international express to Bangkok. That evening Katsuno was to give a party he had prepared for the Thai High Commissioner of the South who was in town and for Major General Sēnānarong, commander of the Sixth Military Region charged with defending peninsular Thailand, who was visiting Songkhla from his headquarters in Nakhon Si Thammarat. The party was to be held at the Songkhla Provincial Association Hall, where Katsuno had hosted his grand party celebrating the opening of the consulate, and he had invited all the upper echelon government officials and military officers in Songkhla as well as Oldham, the British consul, and a number of local Japanese. One of those invited was Plæk Silapakamphisēt, the provincial education officer. He remembered that party. Many guests, probably more than a hundred, had been invited. Katsuno gave a speech; it was in English, Plæk recalled, telling the gathering how Thailand had long been a great nation and mentioning its abstention at the League of Nations in 1933 when that body condemned Japan's military actions in Manchuria. At this point Plæk said that the consul turned to Major General Sēnānarong and asked him about the date he intended to return to his headquarters in Nakhon Si. The general was leaving the next day. With this, Plæk said the consul jokingly remarked, "If the general could remain in Songkhla another day or two, there will be a lot more Japanese coming to join the party."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Tsukamoto's experience in Songkhla on 5–6 Dec from Hatakeyama, pp. 112–113; Tsukamoto interview, 8 Aug 1988.

¹¹⁰ From Plæk interview, 14 Sep 1983.

Katsuno likewise remembered that party. Whether Plæk's recollection of his comment to Sēnān-arong was apocryphal or not, in his own reminiscing, Katsuno never mentioned making such a remark. What Katsuno did recall was sitting across from the British consul and talking about a bottle of white whiskey that was on the table.

It was the first time I had ever tasted white whiskey, and I asked Mr. Oldham, 'What is it?' 'This is whiskey produced in Australia,' he answered. 'What is it made from?' I asked. 'From corn,' he replied. Well, I had some white whiskey. I joked and made small talk with Mr. Oldham. I ate and drank. I had to enjoy the party. Otherwise people might have perceived that something was afoot. But somehow the food was like sand in my mouth, the alcohol like medicine.¹¹¹

In all likelihood Katsuno enjoyed the party more than he recollected. He never missed an opportunity to put on a party or join one put on by someone else. This party had been scheduled and invitations sent well before Katsuno learned that war would break out. That it would take place just two days before the invasion was coincidental. Caught in the circumstance, Katsuno decided to go ahead with the party rather than cancel it at short notice and possibly arouse suspicions.

Attending the party with Katsuno was the consulate's interpreter, Iwasaki. He had no recollection of Katsuno remarking about more Japanese coming in a day or two; and certainly outwardly, Katsuno was in his usual convivial party mode. Iwasaki did little interpreting for the consul on occasions such as this; Katsuno relied on his own communicative ability in English and Chinese. So Iwasaki spent his time chatting with the invited Thai dignitaries and with Oldham, an excellent speaker of Thai. As with Katsuno's previous gala events, food and alcohol were plentiful. To Iwasaki, who was not a smoker or drinker (for this reason the Thais had nicknamed him "Namsom Boy"¹¹² [Orange Drink Boy]), the party had an air of cheerfulness, no one including the British consul exhibiting any concern that they were about to experience a history-changing event.¹¹³

As the party was taking place, two of the consulate staff, Kuboki and Inobe, were apparently on their way to the border where they kept watch through the night. Katsuno mentioned this in his 1982 reminiscence. He wrote that they returned the next morning to report that the border was quiet. Katsuno did not write why they went down to the border, but in an interview with this author, he explained that it was because of the fear that British forces might make a preemptive move into Thailand. Were that to happen, the two were to hurry back to warn the consulate. During the party and for the rest of the

¹¹¹ From Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983. Also Hatakeyama, p. 113 regarding the party.

¹¹² นามสมอบ, Iwasaki, p. 15.

¹¹³ Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989.

night, Katsuno said he worried about the safety of his men at the border.¹¹⁴

In the last hours of December 6th as Katsuno's party drew to a close, a convoy of 27 troop transports and one hospital ship escorted by a fleet of warships was silently approaching the Gulf of Thailand.¹¹⁵ At dawn two days earlier the greater part of this fleet had departed from the port of Sanya¹¹⁶ on Hainan Island. Aboard one of the ships, the Ryūjō-maru, were Lieutenant General Yamashita Tomoyuki, commander of the invasion army, and his staff. Aboard the same ship was Lieutenant Colonel Tsuji Masanobu, the chief architect of the Malaya invasion campaign whose "dream plan" Yamashita had accepted.¹¹⁷ In another 24 hours this ship and nine of the transports would anchor off the coast of Songkhla to commence preparations for landing the main force of Yamashita's 25th Army.¹¹⁸ The other 17 transports in separate groups would head for landings in the Thai provinces of Prajuab Khirikhan, Chumphon, Suratthani, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Pattani, and at Kota Bharu on the northeast coast of Malaya.

December 7th dawned. Katsuno and his three military officers were the only ones at the consulate who knew a landing was coming. The others had not been told. Nevertheless, during the days after Katsuno's return from Bangkok, the nuance in remarks, the tension, and the preparatory activity that prevailed at the consulate gave everyone on the staff the sense that the long-awaited landing was about to happen. Katsuno conferred with his three officers. They decided that no one should leave Songkhla. It might be too dangerous. It would be better to keep the Japanese staff at the consulate that night, to keep everyone together so they could protect themselves until the army arrived. Katsuno then instructed everyone to remain at the office; no one was to return to his own residence after work. That evening after the local staff had gone home, the machine gun and hand grenades were brought out into the large front room by the entrance.¹¹⁹

After leaving work that day, Mon, the consulate driver, went home and talked with one of his neighbors, a worker in the town government, about the gathering of Japanese at the consulate. The activity there was not normal; something was happening. The neighbor helped Mon write up a report of what he had witnessed at the Japanese consulate which the two took over to show to a clerk they knew who worked for the provincial government. This man lived near the governor's residence and was able to

¹¹⁴ In his 28 March interview, Katsuno was more explicit about the venture to the border. He said that Kuboki and Inobe along with whom he called his "Ōkawa Juku boys" (i.e. Itō Keisuke and Iwasaki Yōji) went down to the Thai-Malay border to watch for the British army in case it crossed into Thailand. Were that to happen, they were to blow up a wooden bridge that was down there with dynamite they had taken with them, then hurry back to Songkhla to report. (This version of the venture is also related in Hatakeyama, p. 113.) However, in a 1 Aug 1988 interview with the author, Itō flatly denied that any such undertaking to the border ever took place; he never participated in such a venture nor heard anything about it. As for Iwasaki, he was at the party and never left Songkhla.

¹¹⁵ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, pp. 190–191 lists the 27 troop transports. See appendix "Japanese Ships Involved in the Songkhla Landing Operation" for the warships supporting the landing.

¹¹⁶ 三亜 (pronounced San'a in Japanese).

¹¹⁷ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 219. Tsuji, p. 76, which mentions he was on the same ship as Yamashita. "Dream plan" was the term Tsuji dubbed his Malaya invasion campaign plan.

¹¹⁸ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 190.

¹¹⁹ Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Itō interview, 1 Aug 1988.

arrange a meeting with him. On reading the report, however, the governor had no reaction, simply telling Mon and his neighbor that he did not feel there was anything to worry about and dismissed them. For the two men, that ended the matter, and they returned home.¹²⁰

A heavy downpour began late in the afternoon; by late evening it had largely let up. Dr. Seto was at home. He had lit a small fire and was burning sheets of paper. He did not notice that he was being observed by his wife. She never asked him what he was doing or what the papers were, but after the war when she mentioned the incident to her son, Masao, he could only conclude that his father had been destroying documents related to his spy activities. Thus on the night of December 7th, Seto also realized that the time had come.¹²¹ In close and frequent contact with Katsuno, likely the consul had intimated to Seto that the invasion and war were imminent.

At the consulate the staff was gathered in one room where they were eating and drinking. Katsuno had had the consulate's Japanese cook prepare a spread of food and beverages to relax and entertain the staff. One person, however, was not present. Iwasaki the interpreter, being a non-drinker, preferred to avoid the staff drinking parties that Katsuno was so fond of giving. He seldom joined the rest of the staff when they went to Hādai to party. This evening Iwasaki quietly exited the consulate and walked to the house he rented together with Itō about 50 meters away.¹²²

The eating and drinking at the consulate that evening lacked the usual conviviality. Mix with idle conversation was talk about the machine gun and hand grenades. The three army officers, Ōzone, Kuboki and Inobe, had set up the machine gun, and they demonstrated how the grenades were to be activated and thrown. A tension pervaded the room. Katsuno drank constantly, but the alcohol seemingly had no effect. Through the eating, drinking and small talk, he wondered if it finally was going to be tomorrow. Or might the Thais do something first? Not feeling the liquor, he spoke to Major Kuboki. "Ishii (Kuboki's alias), the alcohol's not working well tonight. Let's have a little more." And the two filled their glasses again. 'Is it going to be tomorrow?' The thought continued to run through Katsuno's mind.¹²³

In the vicinity of the consulate nothing unusual was apparent. Looking toward the main part of town, the lights could be seen shining as usual. There was no Thai military presence. The Japanese army might be landing in a few hours, but nothing around Songkhla had changed. Katsuno put his glass down. The time was now past midnight, and he was extremely tired. He had hardly slept since returning from Bangkok on the 3rd. Not sure if or when the landing might come, he told everyone he was going back to his place to get some sleep. If anything happened, they were to come and get him. As he was leaving he again told everyone to stay inside. Then he left and walked alone to his house that stood about 200 meters away. Before lying down, Katsuno brought out his official white foreign service uniform trimmed with gold buttons and braiding. Next to it he laid the matching white helmet and

¹²⁰ Recollection of Mon Jarensin in Plæk, p. 7.

¹²¹ Seto interview, 13 Aug 1983.

¹²² Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989.

¹²³ Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Hatakeyama, p. 113, which has Katsuno's quote (this author's translation).

ceremonial saber that were also trimmed with gold braiding. Katsuno had learned in China that when the army was in action, soldiers were impatient and heedless of civilian authority. They only understood rank and a uniform befitting it. He had found that the impressive foreign service uniform provided a dignity and authority that soldiers instinctively respected.¹²⁴ And leaving the consulate that night despite sensing that a Japanese invasion was imminent suggests an ulterior motive on Katsuno's part. If as expected, the Japanese army did land, and they arrived at the consulate, the military would have to wait for him, the consul, until he came to meet them.

Kashiwabara had not remained at the consulate that day. Unlike the staff members from Japan, he was a local hire, a local Japanese who lived like the Thais and rented his own residence away from the consulate.¹²⁵ He was feeling uneasy that night. He had not been told of the landing, but like the other uninformed members of the staff, he sensed that tonight was probably the time. He went out to the coast several times that night to check. The whitecaps on the monsoon-blown surf reflected the bright moonlight as the waves thundered monotonously onto the beach. The many weeks of heavy surf had washed away a good portion of the sand creating a bank at the high-water point. Each time he came to check, Kashiwabara stood at this high-water bank and peered out over the moonlit beach and the churning sea, but there was no sign of anyone.¹²⁶

Out in the Gulf of Thailand the flotilla carrying the 25th Army's main force toward Songkhla moved silently westward. At 21:30 Japan time (19:30 in Thailand), the flotilla received the following message from Southern Army headquarters in Saigon¹²⁷:

At present no sign discerned of British forces entering southern Thailand. According to information from the military attaché in Thailand, Thailand's prime minister Phibun has emphasized at an emergency cabinet meeting that Thailand's fate lies with Japan. Therefore we need to be ever mindful of our attitude toward the Thai people.

From this message the forces to land at Songkhla thought that they would meet no resistance from the Thais, that the advance to Malaya would take place essentially unimpeded.

Around 22:40 Japan time (two hours ahead of Thailand time), the flashing beacon of the Songkhla lighthouse was spotted; it was operating as usual. Time passed and gradually the silhouette of hills could be discerned against the night sky. Then the glitter of town lights appeared in the distance. Around half an hour past midnight on 8 December Japan time (which was around 22:30 Thailand time and still December 7th), the ten troop transports had come to anchor in two columns running side-by-side parallel to the coast and facing northward toward the monsoon wind and storm-driven

¹²⁴ Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Katsuno 1982 reminiscence.

¹²⁵ Nishimaki interview, 8 Aug 1988.

¹²⁶ Hatakeyama, p. 116.

¹²⁷ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 217.

waves. The wind was strengthening; the waves were two to three meters high, but there was no rain; and as landing preparations got under way, the moon emerged brightly from a clearing night sky.¹²⁸

Although the time was approaching midnight in Songkhla, the line of darkened ships that anchored off the coast did not go unnoticed. People passing along the coast road brought word that a large number of big ships could be seen off the coast. One of the persons who heard this news was Suchāt Ratanaprakān, owner of Songkhla's largest rice mill. He and several friends took his car and drove out to the beach. It was around 12:30, the start of December 8. They counted about 23 ships; seven or eight were big ones. Likely what Suchāt and his friends saw were the big transports (there were actually ten of them) and the numerous landing boats that were launched to carry the troops to shore. Coming back from the beach, Suchāt and his friends discussed what they had seen. Although possible, they did not automatically conclude that a Japanese invasion was imminent, and they wondered who in authority they should contact. They finally decided to go to the post office, which had telephones, and call the national police headquarters in town and the army units stationed at Camp Suantun. After phoning, the group decided that Suchāt should take his car to get a retired naval officer they knew. This man knew naval signaling. Suchāt took him to the beach, and using a flashlight, he signaled to the ships for identification, but there was no response.¹²⁹

Aboard the ships, landing preparations progressed. The high waves made it very difficult to launch the landing boats and for the troops to clamber down the rope ladders with their heavy gear. A report from the log of the 2nd Battalion of the 11th Infantry Brigade described the difficulties¹³⁰:

Waves high in the area of landing operations. Where the transports anchored, rolling waves at minimum are two meters. Landing boats bang against the mother ships making it extremely difficult for troops to descend into the boats. The light armored cars slam against the landing boats causing damage to the cars; a mere three of them can be loaded into boats for the first wave of troops going ashore.

It's impossible to load tanks during the night. Barely able to load some. With all the rolling and pitching, some boats verge on sinking; gave up effort [to load tanks].

With such conditions, not only the loading gets far behind schedule, but troops on board the transports fall overboard into the waves, and some of them washed off toward the shore.

Landing boats loaded with supplies and equipment are repeatedly swamped by the waves and unable to make their way back to the mother ship. It is practically impossible to land any artillery or vehicles.

Landing operations were scheduled to commence at 03:00 hours (Japan time), but it was not until 03:36 (01:36 local time) that the white signal light at the masthead of the Kashii-maru finally flashed on,

¹²⁸ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 219, p. 226 with a map that names the ships and shows their anchorage alignment.

¹²⁹ Suchāt Ratanaprakān reminiscence, in Plæk, pp. 8–9.

¹³⁰ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, pp. 219–220.

the last of the ten transports to turn on its light signaling that all landing boats were launched and loaded. During the next half hour, from 01:40 until 02:05, the landing boats from each of the transports headed in groups for the beach. As expected, they met no resistance when they reached the shore, but the wind and waves had cause the boats to become scattered, and upon reaching the shore, troops of different units found themselves mixed up with those from other units. Soldiers, officers and unit commanders ran up and down the beach looking for comrades and assembling unit members.¹³¹ The most important of these was the spearhead detachment under the command of Major Ichikawa Tadashi.

The spearhead detachment was to head for the Malay border immediately after landing. In accordance with Tsuji's plan, this detachment had come ashore dressed in Thai army uniforms manufactured by the Japanese army from a sample uniform obtained in Bangkok. They were expecting to make their dash to the border in the cars that Major Ōzone was to have collected at the beach. Posing as Thai soldiers, the detachment was supposed to mingle with fleeing Thai soldiers and civilians who, through bribing, cajoling and panic, would camouflage the Thai-uniformed Japanese troops as they dashed toward the British positions guarding the border. After breaking through the British defenses, the detachment was to speed ahead to capture the bridge spanning the Perak River. At least this is how Tsuji envisioned his plan unfolding.

In Songkhla town, Suchāt decided to check the beach again. This time he and the *nai amphæ*, the Songkhla district officer, Phon Muttāmon, drove out to Samila Point at the northern-most end of the beach. Suchāt dropped Phon off at the Songkhla Provincial Association Hall, the building where two days earlier Katsuno had held his party for the Thai high commissioner and Major General Sēnān-arong. From the hall, Suchāt drove the short distance to the end of the road. Leaving the car engine running, he walked out onto the point to get a view beyond the ironwood trees that lined the beach. Through the night haze he glimpsed silhouettes of people moving around on the beach. He ducked behind a mound of eroded rocks protruding from the sand. Peering from behind the rocks, Suchāt looked down the length of the beach. It was evident that the dark figures were soldiers dressed in combat gear. Some were close enough for Suchāt to overhear. He knew immediately they were speaking Japanese. He had some familiarity with the language. For many years while Suchāt was growing up, the dentist Hisamatsu Tadashi and his wife had been good friends of his family. The doctor had given Suchāt a teach-yourself-Japanese textbook which had given him some knowledge of the language.¹³² Returning quickly to the car, Suchāt drove back to the association hall. Leaving the engine running, he jumped out and ran into the hall to tell Phon that Japanese troops had landed; they were already on the beach. Using the hall's phone, Phon immediately called the post office to pass on the news. The two were about to go out to the car when they saw Japanese soldiers standing around the vehicle. They had already begun moving inland from the beach. Suchāt and Phon left the hall through the back door and made their way along a trail on the north side of Noe Hill, the smaller

¹³¹ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, pp. 219–220.

¹³² When this author interviewed Suchāt in September of 1983, he still had that textbook.

forested hill next to Tangkuan Hill. On the other side of the hill, the trail led out to the road near the British consulate. But they stopped before reaching the road. Japanese soldiers were already moving along the road; some had congregated at the consulate. Suchāt and Phon went no farther; they spent the night on the hillside hiding in the woods.¹³³

Meanwhile during those early hours of December 8, time ticked by at the Japanese consulate. Itō had been sent to fetch his housemate, Iwasaki, and bring him back to the consulate. No one slept; everyone just talked, drank and waited. It was well past midnight, maybe 02:00 or 02:30 of December 8th. In the distance dogs had begun barking. To hear barking dogs at night was not unusual, but this night it was far more widespread and persistent. Something was arousing those animals. Could it be the landing? But no one moved; everyone remained in the consulate.¹³⁴

Perhaps it was the same barking of the dogs that caused Kashiwabara to wonder. He left his house and headed once again for the beach. A broad field lay between the town and the coast. As he crossed this expanse, the sea came into view. In the moonlight Kashiwabara caught sight of the black silhouettes of ships lying well off shore. Getting closer to the beach, he was able to see a line of dark ship silhouettes running parallel to the coast several kilometers off shore. Excitement filled him as he came once again to the high-water bank. Down the length of the beach in scattered groups moving about in the moonlight he saw perhaps as many as two hundred uniformed figures. Over the thunder of the surf and the monsoon wind, he could hear the sound of metal bumping and banging along with the faint sounds of voices. Unable to catch the language, Kashiwabara moved toward several of the nearest figures to ascertain their nationality. Seemingly unwilling to believe that this could truly be the Japanese army coming ashore, he called out to them in Thai. The figures reacted swiftly in Japanese, shouting at Kashiwabara to identify himself. He immediately broke into Japanese, shouting out in delight that he was from the consulate and was ready to assist the soldiers.¹³⁵

Among the scattered troops of these first units coming ashore was Lieutenant Colonel Tsuji Masanobu accompanied by two other staff officers, Lieutenant Colonel Hongō Takeshi and Major Hayashi Tadahiko. They were not among those who ran into Kashiwabara. Tsuji noted that the time on his watch was exactly 04:00 (Japan time, 02:00 Thailand time) when he reached the shore, but no Major Ōzone or vehicles were waiting to carry the landing Ichikawa detachment to the Malay border. Hongō was the 25th Army's staff officer responsible for railroads. He had come ashore with Tsuji to join the railroad spearhead detachment¹³⁶ that was to commandeer the train in the Songkhla railway station. Every morning a train was parked in the station that left for Hādyaï at 6:00 a.m. The spearhead detachment had orders to load its troops and equipment aboard the train and head south as fast as possible with the same objective as the Ichikawa detachment, to capture the bridge over the Perak River. But

¹³³ Suchāt Ratanaprakān reminiscence, in Plæk, pp. 9 and 21; Suchāt interview, 14 Sep 1983.

¹³⁴ Itō interview, 22 Mar 1983.

¹³⁵ Hatakeyama, pp. 116–117.

¹³⁶ *Tetsudō tosshin-tai* (鉄道突進隊).

this unit was not Tsuji's concern. On his mind was Ōzone, who was nowhere to be seen. Hurrying up the beach road, he ran into a man pulling a cart. Reaching out and grabbing him by the neck, Tsuji peered at the man and saw that he was a Thai. Suddenly Tsuji sensed that he might salvage his plan. This Thai could lead him to the consulate and Ōzone. Leaving behind Hongō, who had injured his ankle on landing and could not walk, and Hayashi, who was taking command of the situation on the beach and would wait for Yamashita to land, Tsuji took an orderly and the Thai he had grabbed and hurried off to find the consulate.¹³⁷

At the consulate everyone waited, the tension unrelenting. Suddenly there was a shout and banging at the front gate. According to Tsuji, the following took place¹³⁸:

Dogs barked as we arrived [at the consulate]. I banged on the consulate gate as if to break it down. From inside a shepherd dog growled at us. Then having been awakened, a corpulent man came out and hurriedly opened the gate. It was Katsuno, the consul.

"Ah! Is it the Japanese army?" he shouted, and said nothing more. His breath smelled of ripe persimmons. He had probably drunk heavily the night before.

Ōzone also appeared, standing behind the consul, rubbing his sleepy eyes and dressed in a white suit. Even though we had called him to Saigon specifically and told him all the details about the secret plans for operations immediately after the landing, here he stood. So how were things to go now? Especially for getting automobiles to carry out the dream plan operations, and for dealing with the Thai army and police? I was hit with a sinking feeling. But now was not the time to upbraid him for what he had done. There was no time to lose.

On the consulate side, the recollection was quite different. No one was asleep when Tsuji arrived, and Katsuno was not at the consulate; and although the staff had consumed a good deal of liquor, tension and anxiety prevailed over inebriation. Itō remembered that early morning. He recalled first hearing someone calling from the consulate's front yard, calling something like, "This is Tsuji! Open the door!" This was the first news the people at the consulate had that the landing had begun. As they greeted Tsuji, someone shouted at Itō to go quickly and get the consul. Itō ran to Katsuno's house, bursting into his room shouting, "Consul! Consul! The army's landing!" Katsuno climbed out of bed immediately, switched on the light and looked at his clock. The time was 3:05; he would never forget that (and indicating that an hour had lapsed since Tsuji with the advanced troops had landed on the beach). Unsteady from his heavy drinking, Itō helped Katsuno into his white dress uniform. Suddenly Kuboki ran in shouting that the army was landing. The excited major obviously had come to hurry the consul along.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 218; Tsuji, pp. 88–89. Tsuji wrote that he also took along a young interpreter to the consulate. But this was not so. He had no interpreter until he was joined by Iwasaki Yōji the consulate's interpreter.

¹³⁸ Tsuji, p. 89 (this author's translation).

¹³⁹ Hatakeyama, p. 117; Katsuno 1982 reminiscence; Itō interview, 12 May 1988.

Together with Itō and Kuboki, Katsuno trotted to the consulate to meet the waiting Tsuji. In his reminiscence written four decades later, Katsuno narrated his version of the events that followed.¹⁴⁰ He wrote that on meeting Tsuji, he immediately asked for the British consul's protection. After getting Tsuji's assurance that Oldham would be safe, Katsuno wrote that five people got into the consulate's car: Katsuno himself with Tsuji and Ōzone in the back seat; in the front seat were Iwasaki, the interpreter, and Inobe driving. (However, Ōzone was not with Katsuno and Tsuji¹⁴¹; it was Tsuji's orderly.) From the consulate Katsuno said the five drove out to the beach to check on the landing operations, after which they drove over to the residence of the national police commander intending to have him order his forces not to resist the incoming Japanese troops. On entering the residence, Katsuno said he was met by a maid who told him that the police commander was not at home, that he was out of town (a fact that the Thai side confirmed¹⁴²). Unable to speak with the commander, Katsuno returned to the car, and they headed for the compound of the national police headquarters to call upon the police directly to refrain from fighting the Japanese.

However, Katsuno's narration of the circuitous route taken from the consulate to the police compound is not supported by the recollections of Tsuji Masanobu and Iwasaki Yōji. Tsuji wrote about the event in his book¹⁴³ saying that the immediate concern was dealing with the Thai national police force stationed in Songkhla. Telling Katsuno to lead the way, Tsuji said four people squeezed into the consul's small car; they were Tsuji himself and his orderly who had come with him from the beach, plus Katsuno and an interpreter (who was Iwasaki). However, Tsuji failed to mention the driver, Inobe. From the consulate they drove directly to the police compound located on the other side of Tangkuan Hill not far from the consulate. Like Tsuji, Iwasaki's recollection was that they drove from the consulate directly to the police compound.¹⁴⁴ Both of these participants indicated that the first concern was dealing with the police compound, and neither mentioned any concern about the British consul, going out to the beach, or stopping at the police commander's residence.¹⁴⁵

On the other hand, a Thai account lends support to Katsuno's claim of having stopped at the police commander's residence. In the early hours of the 8th, Police Corporal Phømsak Kuntharō was awoken by a neighbor and told that Japanese forces were landing at the beach. Quickly putting on his uniform, Phømsak got on his bicycle and hurriedly peddled to the police compound near Tangkuan Hill. On the way he passed the police commander's residence where he noticed a car parked at the front gate. He would learn later that the car belonged to a Japanese.¹⁴⁶ Besides this account, a certain logic

¹⁴⁰ This course of events is also related in Hatakeyama, pp. 117–118.

¹⁴¹ Iwasaki letter dated 17 May 1991.

¹⁴² At the time the commander, Police Colonel Luang Phisitwithayākān (หลวงพิสิษฐวิทย์ยุทธการ), was in the provinces on a tour of inspection (Plæk, p. 17).

¹⁴³ Tsuji, pp. 89–90.

¹⁴⁴ Iwasaki, pp. 13–14; Iwasaki letter dated 28 Jul 1991.

¹⁴⁵ In his reminiscence, Iwasaki wrote that it was not until around midday that Katsuno instructed him to go to the British consulate to secure Oldham and bring him to the Japanese consulate. (see p. 43)

¹⁴⁶ The recollection of then Police Corporal Phømsak Kuntharō, in Plæk, p. 17.

supports Katsuno's claim. Seeking out the top commander to have him order his men not to resist would have been more sensible than going directly to the police compound and trying to negotiate with the lower ranking people in charge there who were under orders to resist.

Driving in the consulate car without protection to the armed headquarters of the national police, quixotic in hindsight, indicates that the Japanese anticipated being able to meet and negotiate with the Thais to prevent a clash between the two sides and Thai obstruction of the Japanese advance on Malaya. But word had spread in Songkhla that the Japanese army was coming ashore, and policemen like Corporal Phoemsak had rushed from their homes and assembled at the police compound in preparation to resist the Japanese. When they saw a car approaching and recognized it as belonging to a Japanese, they began shooting at it. In his book, Tsuji narrated his recollection of the encounter.¹⁴⁷

With the bright beams of the car lights lighting up the road, we soon drew near to a large iron gate. "That over there is the main gate of the police station," the consul said, and my eyes looked in the direction he was pointing. Just then there was the sound of a shot, and instantly a loud sound erupted from the car headlights. All around us turned pitch black. Two, three shots followed. The distance between us was less than 20 meters, so it was easy to understand why the shots hit us.

These shots brought a shattering end to the morning dreams of Songkhla's citizenry. These were also the first shots in this military campaign, and without doubt were also the first beacon signaling the liberation of East Asia.

A shot grazed my right arm; then another came through between the consul and me at hip level.¹⁴⁸ Without a moment's thought, I opened the door and rolled face down into the drainage ditch at the side of the road.

Shouting in a loud voice, I had the interpreter call out:

"We're the Japanese army! Don't shoot!"

"We're here to make an alliance with you and to attack the British army."¹⁴⁹

We shouted this a few times, but there was not the least indication that they were going to let up. Instead their shooting grew heavier. The consul's white linen suit seemingly became a clear target even in the dark.

The bullets made a strange sound as they whizzed over our heads, and the shooting increased. There were at least 30 or 40 of them who were randomly and haphazardly shooting at us.

It was a hopeless situation. The shadows of people moving about inside the gate of the police station continued to increase. Could it be that they were going to come out and attack us? I now told the consul and the interpreter to withdraw back along the drainage ditch. I and the orderly

¹⁴⁷ Tsuji, pp. 90–92 (this author's translation).

¹⁴⁸ The bullet from one of these shots could have been one that penetrated the front seat just to Iwasaki's left. (Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989)

¹⁴⁹ Recalling that moment, Iwasaki said he called for the police to stop firing, and return shouts rejecting his call could be heard from the compound. (Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989)

remained face down in the ditch for a while to keep a watch on the situation.

I did not want to die from some wild and random bullet shot by a Thai policeman. I was resolved to start all over again from a clean slate. I was abandoning the heavy *furoshiki* bundle of 100,000 baht,¹⁵⁰ leaving it right there in the car on the road. It seemed that dozens of bullets had already been shot into the car. It was vexing to pull back knowing full well that we would be leaving it as a souvenir for them.

“Sir, I will go get it,” the orderly said to me, seemingly thinking it was his responsibility. In the midst of the fierce shooting, he crawled out of the ditch and moved toward the car.

I could not lose the life of a soldier for 100,000 baht.

“Hey, forget it; forget it; just leave it.” I tried to caution him, but I guess my words did not reach his ears because he kept crawling gecko-like closer to the car. Strangely he was not hit by any bullets. Eventually he came back from the car pulling the *furoshiki* bundle. With that draped over his shoulder, the two of us crawled back on all fours keeping our heads facing toward the enemy in case they tried to do something to us.

Police Corporal Phoemsak was in the police compound when shooting began. He learned that it was directed at a car belonging to a Japanese that had approached the police compound gate. It turned out to be the same car he had seen earlier parked in front of the police commander's house, and the car was said to belong to Dr. Gaiche (i.e., Seto Hisao).¹⁵¹ Clearly the car the Thai police shot at belonged to the consulate and not Dr. Gaiche.

After leaving Tsuji and the orderly, Katsuno, Iwasaki and Inobe (not mentioned by Tsuji) had made their way back to the consulate. They had crawled along the ditch until they reached the shadow that Tangkuan Hill cast over the road blocking out the moonlight. Then after walking in a crouch for a safe distance, they hurriedly walked upright back to the consulate.¹⁵² By now Japanese units had begun occupying strategic locations around Songkhla. They took over the airport; occupied the train station, the power station and the post office, and took control of the port, which would be used later in the day to begin offloading the army's heavy weapons and equipment. They also seized the provincial governor's residents, which Yamashita would make his headquarters. (The general and his staff arrived at the residence at around six o'clock in the morning.¹⁵³)

¹⁵⁰ Tsuji had brought this money along which he was prepared to offer the police as an inducement not to resist the Japanese. It was worth about \$27,800 at the pre-war exchange rate of 3.6 baht=\$1.00. (There was no exchange rate during the war.)

¹⁵¹ Phoemsak Kuntharō recollection in Plæk, p. 17.

¹⁵² Katsuno 1982 reminiscence.

¹⁵³ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 225, which recorded the time as around 08:00 Japan time.

Little fighting took place in Songkhla town, but there were casualties.¹⁵⁴ Although insignificant by combat standards, Katsuno and Iwasaki witnessed one. When they got back to the consulate, a badly wounded soldier, shot in the abdomen, was lying on the consulate veranda. He died two hours later. The soldier's body was taken to the back of the compound where it was cremated and the ashes buried. A *sotoba* (wooden grave maker) was put up on which was written the following: the grave of Infantry Master Sergeant Kagimura Yasuo, died in battle, Shōwa 16 December 8.¹⁵⁵

As some units secured strategic locations in the town, and Tsuji with Katsuno were attempting to deal with the national police, other units of the landing army had begun advancing down the road toward Hādyai. Word of the Japanese landing had reached the headquarters at Camp Suantun, but many of the soldiers lived off the camp, and time passed before enough men could be assembled. As a result a few small, quickly assembled Japanese vanguard units advanced down the highway unopposed before units from Suantun took up positions along the highway near the junction known as the Samrong three-way intersection¹⁵⁶ immediately south of Songkhla. One of the later units to leave for Hādyai was Major Ichikawa's special spearhead detachment. Although it was to have been the first unit to head for Malaya dressed in Thai uniforms in the vehicles Ōzone was to have collected at the beach, this plan collapsed immediately. No vehicles were at the beach, and the detachment spent the next couple of hours going around Songkhla commandeering cars, trucks and buses.¹⁵⁷ It was not until around 07:30 in the morning that the detachment, sans Thai uniforms (these had been discarded with the collapse of Tsuji's plan) began moving out to town.¹⁵⁸ But they immediately ran into the Thai troops from Suantun who had taken up positions just south of Songkhla on the high ground of Rūp Chang Hill.¹⁵⁹ Overlooking the highway some three to four hundred meters back from the road, the Thai forces unleashed a concentration of fire that brought the advancing Japanese column to an imme-

¹⁵⁴ In an interview four decades later, Katsuno said he had heard that the Japanese suffered 16 dead and wounded, the Thais nine during the opening day of the invasion (Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983). He also reported in the interview (and in his 1982 reminiscence) that about a week after the invasion started, he was riding alone in the consulate car when he noticed off to the right a large number of white wooden stakes standing on the hillside. (This would have been Tangkuan or Noe Hill.) Checking closer Katsuno said he saw dozens and dozens of *sotoba* grave markers. He learned that these marked the graves of the soldiers who had drowned during the landing. (No other person the author interviewed mentioned seeing or knowing about these graves.)

A Thai source reported that 23 Thai soldiers died during the fighting on the morning of 8 December. ("Yipun buk hād hād samilā", on the Internet, information in English)

¹⁵⁵ 歩兵曹長鍵村保夫之墓、昭和十六年十二月八日戦死 (*Hohei sōchō Kagimura Yasuo no haka, Shōwa 16 nen jūni gatsu yōka senshi*). Shōwa 16 was 1941. (Katsuno 1982 reminiscence)

Iwasaki mistakenly wrote in his reminiscence that the cremated soldier, whom he said was a 19-year-old corporal, was Tsuji's orderly who died of wounds sustained in the shooting at the national police headquarters (Iwasaki, p. 14). But as noted above, Tsuji wrote in his book on the Singapore campaign that his orderly did not get killed. Moreover, the soldier was a master sergeant, not a corporal.

Kagimura's ashes and grave marker remained in the consulate compound until late in the war when the ashes were disinterred and taken back to Japan. (Katsuno 1982 reminiscence; Tsukamoto interview, 20 Feb 1989)

¹⁵⁶ Sāmyæk Samrōng (สามแยกสำโรง); the main intersection where the road to Camp Suantun branches off from the highway going to Hādyai.

¹⁵⁷ Suchāt Ratanaprakān, owner of Songkhla's biggest rice mill, had two automobiles and a truck. All three were commandeered.

¹⁵⁸ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 220.

¹⁵⁹ Khao Rūp Chang (เขารูปช้าง).

diate halt.¹⁶⁰ The Japanese troops piled out of their vehicles, quickly improvised defensive positions and began returning fire. Carrying only light weapons and traveling in locally commandeered rather than armored military vehicles, the success of the special spearhead detachment was premised on speed and no Thai armed resistance. Speed had been compromised when no vehicles were awaiting the detachment on landing at the beach. Now this unexpected resistance from the Thai army undid the detachment's entire battle plan.¹⁶¹

Consternation grew among the Japanese commanders on the ground. They had understood that Phibun, and therefore Thailand, was partial to Japan; that the 25th Army's objective was to attack the British in Malay, and the move through Thailand was to be quick. Instead of standing aside, the Thai army was putting up a fight. Katsuno wrote in his reminiscence that staff officers, including Major Hayashi, approached him asking if there was not something he could do to contact the Thai military and get them to halt their resistance.¹⁶² Through one of his local Chinese contacts, Katsuno said he was able to make contact with a Thai police captain he was acquainted with, and via him get a message through to the commander at Camp Suantun, a lieutenant colonel. Time passed; the resistance continued. Then around midday, the Thais ceased fire. By then orders had come from Bangkok, from Phibun as prime minister and supreme commander of all Thai armed forces, that all resistance by Thai military forces was to cease. Coincidentally it was also around that time that Katsuno's contact came back with the captain's message that the Thai units from Camp Suantun were to cease their resistance and pull back.¹⁶³ Meanwhile over the course of the several hours of fighting casualties had mounted, and not until around midday did Ichikawa's special spearhead detachment start moving again toward Hād̄yai.

Unlike the problems Ichikawa's detachment ran into immediately on landing, the railroad spearhead detachment was able to commandeer the train at Songkhla's station as planned and departed at around 03:40.¹⁶⁴ (Suchāt Ratanaprakān, hiding in the woods on the side of Noe Hill, heard the train pull out of the station. He estimated that the time was around 04:00, two hours ahead of 06:00, its scheduled departure time.¹⁶⁵) The train rolled out of Songkhla headed for Hād̄yai. The rail line ran a considerable distance to the west of the Samrong three-way junction, so if any Thai forces had begun setting up positions there, it would not have affected the progress of the train. However, news was spreading of the landing at Songkhla. It had reached the village of Nam Noe¹⁶⁶ about 15 kilometers from Songkhla (half way to Hād̄yai). In the vicinity of the village, the railway and highway ran side by

¹⁶⁰ Recollection of Thawin Nopphānit (ถวิล นพพานิช), a soldier in the 41st Infantry Battalion stationed at Camp Suantun, in Plæk, pp. 19–20.

¹⁶¹ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 221.

¹⁶² Katsuno even mentions Tsuji as one of the staff officers who came to him. But in his book Tsuji says nothing about doing this.

¹⁶³ Katsuno interview, 10 Apr 1983. Katsuno's effort to contact the Thai army commander at Suantun was confirmed by Nishimaki in a 30 March 1983 interview.

¹⁶⁴ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 220, which says 05:40 Japan time.

¹⁶⁵ From the recollections of Suchāt Ratanaprakān, in Plæk, p. 26.

¹⁶⁶ Bān Nām Noe (บ้านน้ำน้อย).

side and eventually crossed each other. Here troops assembled, and the village headman along with the mayor of Hādyaī, whose house was in Nam Noe, organized villagers to help the soldiers quickly prepare defensive positions to block the highway and the railroad. One position was set up to cover the spot where the railway crossed the highway; there a truck was parked on the tracks. Boulders and other obstacles were scattered on the rails. Then orders came from the army to cut the rail line with explosives. The railroad spearhead detachment ran into this hastily prepared strong point. A firefight broke out, the Thais firing on the train and its passengers from several directions. The fighting continued until sometime before midday when an order arrived from army headquarters to cease fire.¹⁶⁷ As a result of this confrontation and the damage to the rail line, the detachment and its commandeered train did not arrive in Hādyaī until 16:00 in the afternoon.¹⁶⁸

Sometime after midday and the onset of the Thai ceasefire, Katsuno told Iwasaki to go over to the British consulate and secure the safety of Consul Oldham. This would be Iwasaki's first direct encounter with the Japanese troops, and he was apprehensive as the only authority he stood on was the directive of the Japanese consul. Would the soldiers occupying the British consulate accept that? Nishimaki drove Iwasaki the few hundred meters that separated the two consulates. The road was filled with Japanese troops. Entering the British consulate compound with an air of authority, Iwasaki announced that he was from the Japanese consulate and had come to take responsibility for the British consul. Some soldiers looked him over suspiciously, but none interfered as he entered the building. Oldham met him with an outburst of Thai, complaining that he felt threatened, that he had been maltreated, had been roughed up and slapped in the face. Wanting to leave quickly and not make a scene, Iwasaki took Oldham to the car saying they could talk about everything later. Right now he wanted to get the consul to the safety of the Japanese consulate. When they got back to the consulate, Iwasaki could see a sense of relief on Katsuno's face as he greeted the British consul.¹⁶⁹

Over the course of December 8th and for days thereafter, the main forces and support units of Yamashita's 25th Army came ashore. Some units soon moved out toward Hādyaī. Units to move out later found places to bivouac in temple and school compounds, public buildings and government offices; like the Songkhla governor's residence, the provincial government's office¹⁷⁰ was taken over for Japanese army use. Over the weeks of the Malaya campaign, Songkhla was the entry point for an ongoing flow of troops, military equipment and supplies.

Although an order had come down from Bangkok for Thai forces to cease fire and not hinder the Japanese army's advance, during the afternoon of December 8th, tension remained and the situation precarious. That evening Katsuno and Iwasaki attended a meeting called by Commander Yamashita at his headquarters in the provincial governor's residence. Iwasaki, a 20-year-old youth and perhaps the

¹⁶⁷ The recollection of Phut Thipharat (ฟูต ทิพรัตน์), former mayor of Hādyaī, in Plæk, pp. 27–28.

¹⁶⁸ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 225, which recorded the train's arrival time as 18:00 Japan time.

¹⁶⁹ Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989; Iwasaki, p. 14.

¹⁷⁰ *sālākāng* (ศาลากลาง).

youngest in the room, recalled that the general wanted one of his staff officers to go to the commander of the Thai forces in the area and have him come to the Japanese headquarters. Yamashita wanted to meet the Thai commander and talk with him directly. Iwasaki related that there was some discussion among the assembled staff officers, but none immediately agreed to undertake the mission. Then an officer sitting off to the side of the room stood up. He was a major; he said he would go. Then he turned to the two attending consulate people and asked that the consulate's interpreter come with him. The mission was fraught with danger, but he wanted the interpreter to accompany him. Iwasaki agreed to go.

To carry out the mission, they needed someone on the Thai side to lead the way to the Thai headquarters. Contact was made with a captain in the Thai national police. Katsuno was acquainted with the captain, and apparently an intermediary, a local Chinese-Thai whom Katsuno dealt with, did the contacting.¹⁷¹ A squad of Thai police on motorcycles under the command of the captain arrived at Yamashita's headquarters. Iwasaki and the major (whose name Iwasaki recalled as Sugita) got into motorcycle sidecars, and the squad roared off for Thai army headquarters.

Iwasaki recalled that they went down the night-black road and into the mountains for about 20 minutes. They arrived at the entry of a fortified position. Only the police captain was allowed in. Iwasaki and the major along with the rest of the police squad waited outside. It became quite a long wait, and the somewhat uncomfortable Iwasaki noticed that the major had fallen asleep in his sidecar, apparently overcome by the fatigue of the past 24 hours.

Eventually the captain returned. Iwasaki and the major were led in to meet the commander; in the room with him were the deputy commander, the provincial governor and the chief justice of the regional court. Iwasaki was well acquainted with the latter two having frequently met them at the social gatherings that Katsuno held between the consulate and Songkhla's leading officials and citizenry. The governor and chief justice immediately called out Iwasaki's name and greeted him. Following this ice breaker, the major talked with the Thai commander about Yamashita's request. The commander accepted, and he along with the deputy commander went to the Japanese HQ to meet the general. With Iwasaki as interpreter, Yamashita apologized for his army's invasion and the disruption to people's lives. In essence he explained that it was unavoidable in Japan's battle against the British in Malaya, and he asked that Thailand support Japan in its fight against Western colonialism. In his turn, the Thai commander assured Yamashita that the forces under his command would not hinder the Japanese advance to Malaya.¹⁷²

By the second day of the invasion, local people started showing up at the Japanese consulate to complain about the actions of the troops. Beyond the vehicles that had been commandeered, which

¹⁷¹ In his reminiscence, Katsuno wrote about contacting a Thai police captain, with whom he was acquainted, to go to the Thai army commander on behalf of the Japanese. But the timeframe for this, according to Katsuno, was in the late morning of December 8th, and it was undertaken in conjunction with Japanese army efforts to get the local Thai forces to cease resisting the Japanese advance. In Iwasaki's recollection, contacting the police captain whom Katsuno knew took place in the evening of the 8th.

¹⁷² Iwasaki, p. 15; Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989; Iwasaki letter dated 17 May 1991.

included bicycles, a major complaint was fruits and vegetables and other food stuffs being taken from shops. There were complaints of merchandise and pieces of property getting damaged or broken, and complaints of being abused or manhandled by soldiers. Iwasaki, who had to interpret for the consul and the staff, remembered one poignant moment. An old woman had come to the consulate; she was a poor street peddler. Major Ōzone stood listening with a glum look on his face as Iwasaki interpreted the woman's complaint. Apparently moved by what the old woman had experienced, Ōzone reached into his pocket and with his own money paid the woman for her loss. According to Iwasaki, Katsuno became so incensed with the growing number of complaints that he finally decided to go straight to the top. Taking Iwasaki with him, he went to Yamashita's headquarters to appeal directly to the commander, and the following took place. On hearing what the consul reported, Yamashita became very angry. He summoned his chief of staff. When he appeared, Yamashita shouted, "What the heck is going on?! If a Japanese soldier is caught doing something wrong, have him shot!" After leaving Yamashita's presence and clearly upset that Katsuno had gone over his head, the chief of staff gave the consul and Iwasaki a severe tongue lashing for not having talked to him first. But problems with the troops persisted, until a *kempei* (military police) unit arrived in Songkhla around ten days after the invasion began. This greatly reduced misconduct by the troops.¹⁷³ The Songkhla government also set up an office where citizens could bring their complaints.

On December 9th Yamashita moved his headquarters from the governor's residence in Songkhla to Hādyai.¹⁷⁴ On the 11th, three days after landing, the vanguard units of his 25th Army ran into British defenses at Jitra in Malaya, 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Songkhla. By the 13th, the British forces had pulled back in disorganized retreat. As the Jitra battle raged, Yamashita held an evening party at his headquarters for local Thai military, government and business leaders. In attendance were the Japanese consul, Katsuno Toshio, and his interpreter, Iwasaki Yōji. Iwasaki was attending as Yamashita's interpreter. The general had prepared a speech for the party, and Iwasaki had spent the previous day working with Billy Tobina, the consulate's clerk-typist, learning the Thai vocabulary he would need to interpret the general's speech. In it Yamashita apologized for Japan's invasion of Thai territory and the distress it was causing the Thai people. But as in his meeting with the Thai army commander several days earlier, Yamashita told his listeners that passage through Thai territory was an unavoidable action in Japan's fight against the British colonialists in Malaya. The general talked about the exploitation of the British, noting for example that the salary of the lowest-ranking colonial official in Malaya was higher than that of the governor of Songkhla province. The war that Japan was now waging was for the liberation of all Asian peoples who had been colonized by Britain and other western countries. Through his listeners, Yamashita called on Thailand to cooperate with Japan in this war against the Western colonialists.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Iwasaki, pp. 16–17; Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989; Iwasaki letter dated 17 May 1991.

¹⁷⁴ *Marei shinkō sakusen*, p. 291.

¹⁷⁵ Iwasaki letter dated 17 May 1991.

The Aftermath of Invasion

By December 12th the staff at the Japanese consulate had dropped to five: Katsuno, the consul; Nishimaki, the chief administrative secretary; Iwasaki, the interpreter; Kashwabara, Nishimaki's administrative assistant; and Tobina, the clerk-typist. The three military officers, Ōzone, Kuboki and Inobe, had headed south for Malaya with units of the invading army. Itō Keisuke received Katsuno's permission to leave the consulate and head for Malaya to join the *F-Kikan* group under Major Fujiwara. Itō met up with Fujiwara in Alor Star and eventually ended up in Singapore where he joined an *F-Kikan* team that procured provisions and lodging for Indian soldiers who became POWs of the Japanese. Efforts were made to care for these POWs and recruit them into the Indian National Army that was being organized under Japanese auspices.¹⁷⁶ Another person who left with the army was Seto Hisao, although he apparently left against his wishes.¹⁷⁷ He had lived many years in Malaya, spoke Malay; the army was in need of people with his knowledge and experience to help administer Malaya once it had been occupied. Thus the army could have compelled him to go. However, Seto was clearly a patriot and had willingly acted as an intelligence agent for the military, so he could have felt it was his patriotic duty to go to Malaya and work for the army. He worked in the military government administration in Malacca,¹⁷⁸ becoming the town's chief of police.¹⁷⁹

A day or two after the party at Japanese army headquarters, Katsuno received a message from the embassy in Bangkok about the killing of Japanese nationals in the town of Nakhon Si Thammarat, 160 kilometers (100 miles) north of Songkhla. The incident had occurred on 8 December, the day Japanese forces invaded the town. Katsuno accompanied by Iwasaki traveled up to Nakhon Si to investigate. He learned that members of the national police had killed eight Japanese who were working for the Eikō Group,¹⁸⁰ a civil engineering company. A number of these civil engineering companies had been set up as joint Japanese-Thai ventures at the behest of the Japanese army. Although doing survey work for road construction, it was evident that the companies were using their activity to collect topographical information for the army. In the excitement of December 8th and news of Japanese army landings at various points in southern Thailand, the police in Nakhon Si apparently overreacted, attacked the lodging where the Eikō Group workers were staying and killed eight of them. Katsuno tried to arrange a meeting with the commander of the police, but he refused to see Katsuno. Finding his efforts futile, Katsuno decided to leave further investigation of the incident to the better staffed embassy in Bang-

¹⁷⁶ Itō interview, 22 Mar 1983. Itō remained in Singapore until war's end. On his departure from the Songkhla consulate, Katsuno gave him a watch, a gesture that Itō never forgot.

Regarding the three army officers, Ōzone Yoshihiko would rise to the rank of major general; he died in the Philippines on Leyte Island on 15 Apr 1945. Inobe Jūchin survived the war; he would go into banking in Kochi City retiring as president of Kochi Mutual Bank (Kōchi Sōgō Ginkō); he died in January 1983. The author found no information about the fate of Major Kuboki.

¹⁷⁷ According to son, Masao, in his interview of 13 Aug 1983.

¹⁷⁸ Seto interview, 13 Aug 1983.

¹⁷⁹ Tsukamoto interview, 3 Mar 1989. According to Tsukamoto, Seto returned to Songkhla toward the end of the war.

¹⁸⁰ Eikō-dan (榮工団).

kok.¹⁸¹ (Early in January 1942, Japanese embassy officials led by Asada, the consul-general, with the assistance of Consul Amada, arrived in Nakhon Si Thammarat to undertake an investigation. The Thais never admitted to wrongfully killing the Japanese workers, but after negotiation between the embassy and the Thai leadership, the Thai government agreed to pay compensation for the deaths.)

During the several days that Katsuno and Iwasaki were in Nakhon Si Thammarat, an incident occurred in Songkhla. Japanese soldiers brought in several British operatives whom they had captured in the vicinity of the Thai–Malay border. A summary trial took place in Songkhla after which the captives were taken to the beach and shot dead. Katsuno learned about the killing after returning from Nakhon Si.¹⁸² This summary execution would be dubbed the Songkhla incident and would have ramifications for Katsuno and Iwasaki after the war.

As the Malaya invasion campaign was getting underway, another person joined the consulate staff. To the other staff members, he was known simply as Mr. Kōda (Kōda-san). Born in Taiwan, Kōda (whose Chinese name was Huáng Bǐngdīng¹⁸³) was a Japanese citizen, as Taiwan had been part of the Japanese Empire since 1895. He had joined the foreign service and was stationed at the Japanese consulate-general in Haikou¹⁸⁴ on Hainan Island when on December 8th he learned that Japanese forces had begun invading Malaya. Shortly thereafter he was sent to Thailand and down to the consulate in Songkhla. Following his arrival, Katsuno rented a house in Hādyaï. It became a “satellite office” with Kōda, only 23 years old, in charge. Katsuno introduced Kōda to businessmen with whom the consul had developed working relationships, and Kōda’s job was to further cultivate relations with Hādyaï’s local Chinese, thereby improving and promoting business between them and Japanese companies. He was also to provide Katsuno with information and intelligence on Hādyaï’s Chinese community.¹⁸⁵

During the Malaya campaign, Songkhla with its port was a major entry point for the flow of men, equipment and supplies to Yamashita’s 25th Army as it advanced down the Malay Peninsula toward its eventual capture of Singapore and British capitulation on 15 February 1942, sixty-nine days after its landing at Songkhla. Supply depots and motor pools were set up in the compounds of schools and government buildings. Men were bivouacked in schools and temples until their units headed for Malaya. A military police detachment (*kempei-tai*) and a railroad unit were stationed in town along with a supply and logistics unit headquartered in the Women’s Teacher Training School next door to the consulate.¹⁸⁶ Numbers of soldiers who were stationed for months in Songkhla took up residence in some of the larger homes. Suchāt Ratanaprakān’s family had such an experience. A Japanese army

¹⁸¹ Katsuno interview 28 Mar 1983; Katsuno 1982 reminiscence; Hatakeyama, p. 121; Iwasaki, pp. 17–18.

¹⁸² Hatakeyama, p. 121; Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983; Iwasaki, pp. 17–18.

¹⁸³ His name in Chinese characters was 黃丙丁.

¹⁸⁴ 海口 (Hāikōu, pronounced Kaikō in Japanese).

¹⁸⁵ Huáng letter dated 22 Jul 1991. Huáng wrote that as Mr. Kōda, he gathered information on the distribution of the local Chinese ethnic communities and their business affairs, and on such matters as their impressions of the Japanese, British and Thais, and on their patriotic feelings for China.

¹⁸⁶ Nishimaki interview, 30 Mar 1983.

veterinarian, First Lieutenant Takei and his assistant, Private Yokomichi Masao, came to Suchât's house one day. The lieutenant indicated that he and his assistant along with his team of some 12 members wanted to stay at Suchât's residence while they were stationed in town. Suchât acquiesced. The soldiers took over the first floor of his three-story residence while the family moved upstairs to live on the upper two floors. The lieutenant and his assistant were Japanese, but the rest of the team were all Taiwanese. None could speak English. Suchât used pantomime and his ability at writing Chinese characters to communicate. Lt. Takei and his team remained in Songkhla for about half a year. They all were very nice, very polite; they caused no problems at all, and during their six-month stay, Suchât's family developed a rapport with the lieutenant and particularly with his assistant, Masao. Suchât had one particularly memorable recollection of his Japanese "guests." They loved their *furo* bath, a hot-water-filled 55-gallon drum on a wood fire that they set up in the courtyard at the center of the house. But Suchât and his family never became comfortable with the soldiers' habit of bathing and walking around the courtyard nude.¹⁸⁷

With the capture of Singapore and end of the Malaya campaign, conditions settled down in Songkhla. Residents, predominantly local Chinese, began showing up at the consulate with slips of paper. These people turned out to be the owners of vehicles that had been commandeered. Japanese soldiers had left the slips when their vehicles were taken. On them were written names, presumably those of the soldiers who had taken the vehicles. Apparently this was the army's attempt to give their commandeering a veneer of propriety that vehicles were not simply being purloined, that these slips of paper would give the owners recourse to restitution. Nishimaki, the consulate's chief secretary, recalled the episode¹⁸⁸:

After their automobiles got taken, got commandeered, the Chinese, most of them were local Chinese, they didn't know what to do. They thought probably the best thing was to go to the Japanese consulate. So they came over to us with the slips of paper that had been left behind; they brought those to the consulate. Looking at those, there were all kinds of names written on them, names from olden times, Japanese samurai names, Araki Mataemon and the like. They brought those in; there were dozens of people; and there we were with all these slips of paper. Anyway, after the landing had taken place, a supply depot was set up in Songkhla. There was nothing else we could do except go over there to talk about all these cars that had been taken away. We told the Chinese we'd go over for them and talk to the army. So we contacted the army, and we asked the depot headquarters to do something about this problem. Later on they brought back cars. They were broken down, some not completely whole vehicles. How many dozens of cars were there? The army brought them to the consulate; broken down, parts missing; a whole bunch of them they brought back. What could we say? We looked at the list we had of owners whose cars had

¹⁸⁷ Suchât interview, 15 Sep 1983.

¹⁸⁸ From Nishimaki interview, 14 May 1987.

been commandeered; contacted them; told them their cars were over here and to come take them away. They came. There were tires and all kinds of bits and pieces that those local Chinese came and took away. They took everything and I guess did something with it all.

When faced with the junk and wreckage being proffered as the return of their commandeered vehicles, Nishimaki noted that none of the owners complained or protested. The war had started, and they understood the situation. Moreover, the majority of the vehicles commandeered had belonged to local Chinese, and the soldiers doing the commandeering had been Japanese soldiers who had come from combat in China. For them the Chinese were the enemy, be they in China or southern Thailand. In the situation, the local Chinese avoided voicing complaints.¹⁸⁹

With the close of the Malaya campaign, the hubbub of activity that for months had animated the Japanese consulate in Songkhla largely died away. Katsuno decided that Iwasaki should return to Bangkok. He was not official foreign service staff, like Nishimaki, appointed to the consulate; the need for his interpreting had diminished (the consulate had Kashiwabara and Tobina who could serve when needed as Thai interpreters), and Katsuno worried that the army might try to co-opt use of Iwasaki as an interpreter. It would be safer for him to be back at the embassy in Bangkok. So in late February Iwasaki headed back to Bangkok and the embassy where he remained for the duration of the war.¹⁹⁰

The end of the Malaya campaign also meant the end of the Songkhla consulate's purpose: to gather intelligence. It lost its *raison d'être* as battles shifted to more distant fronts. No longer a center for covert operations, the edgy excitement of espionage faded away. The consul continued to pay due respects and make the expected visitations to local government dignitaries. He interceded when problems occurred between Japanese troops and the local community. He was particularly protective of the local Chinese business community. But with the return of peace to the Malay Peninsula, the consulate had little work beyond registering births, deaths and marriages amongst the scatter of Japanese, most of them long-term residents, living in the consulate's region of jurisdiction. The staff dutifully came to work each day. Time was filled with writing up routine reports, idle conversation, reading, and activities such as badminton outside on the lawn, drives out to the beach to drink *oliang* (iced coffee mixed with sweet condensed milk), mahjong in the evenings; and there were the frequent trips to Hādyaï to enjoy the food, drink and nightlife.

Despite the lack of work, in the spring of 1943 the consulate staff received a new member, Okamaru Shōji. He had been stationed at the embassy in Bangkok, but because of overstaffing, he was sent down

¹⁸⁹ Of the three vehicles commandeered from Suchāt Ratanaprakān, one of his cars was returned after the Malaya campaign. When interviewed in September 1983, he still had that car, which he kept for memory sake although it had become dilapidated and inoperable.

¹⁹⁰ Iwasaki interview, 8 May 1989.

to Songkhla.¹⁹¹ Okamaru had been born in the United States, in Tacoma, Washington, where his father was in charge of the Tacoma office of his extended family's import/export business. He was born around 1914, remained in the U.S. through elementary school, went to Japan for high school (then known as middle school) and college, then returned to the U.S. to work in the family business. That was around 1937/38. In 1941 he joined the Japanese foreign service at the urging of a cousin who was a foreign service officer. At that time Okamaru renounced his U.S. citizenship. Following the outbreak of war in December 1941, he was interned as were all Japanese foreign service officers in the U.S., all of whom returned on the same repatriation ship in August 1942. Back in Tokyo the Foreign Ministry became concerned that Okamaru would be conscripted. Told he was to be transferred to Saigon or Bangkok, he was asked which posting he would prefer. Knowing that French was the language in Saigon while English was the predominant foreign language in Bangkok, he chose the latter.

Okamaru was not pleased with the transfer to Songkhla. He knew it was a small backwater place. He preferred Bangkok with its large, sophisticated Japanese community. He had also heard about the "unusual" consul stationed in Songkhla. At the consulate he had no work to do, no position to fill; Nishimaki handled what little work the consulate did. To fill the workless hours, Okamaru turned to reading. A friend in the embassy library regularly sent him good books, which turned his Songkhla stint into a period of good, concentrated reading. Mahjong became another time filler. Okamaru joined with Nishimaki and Yoneda¹⁹² on the consulate staff plus one of the Mitsubishi or Mitsui people in Hādai for rounds of evening mahjong. And there were the frequent staff trips, led by Katsuno, to wine and dine in Hādai, but Okamaru did not find them particularly enjoyable and seldom joined in.

Okamaru would spend about half a year at the Songkhla consulate. During that time he observed Katsuno, the "unusual, very unusual" consul, and tried to get a grasp of him. His impression began on his arrival at the consulate. Okamaru traveled by boat from Bangkok to Songkhla.

I arrived at night, so I didn't see much outside. I was met by somebody. Nishimaki, I think, came to the boat and took me to the consulate by his car. There was some celebration going on there, and Katsuno was quite drunk. He told me that he was happy that I could join the consulate staff. But I doubted...I wondered if I would be able to get along with this unusual man.¹⁹³

It was not just the extent of Katsuno's drinking, both in and out of the office. It was his lack of refinement, his boastfulness and loud talk, very often about his kendo prowess. Okamaru kept his distance. He grew tired of Katsuno's boasting, his talk about the same things and what he did in China.

¹⁹¹ Information on Okamaru from Okamaru interview, 17 Mar 1989. Okamaru could not remember exactly when he was sent to Bangkok; it was at the end of 1942 or the beginning of 1943.

Prior to Okamaru, a Mr. Yoneda had joined the consulate staff, but the author learned little about him other than that he was an excellent speaker of English.

¹⁹² See footnote 191 about Yoneda.

¹⁹³ From Okamaru interview, 17 Mar 1989.

But he watched Katsuno closely “trying to find out what was behind his conduct and peculiar behavior.” It was not because he was stuck in a backwater consulate that had become irrelevant. Katsuno’s behavior and hard drinking went back to his China days. Ultimately Okamaru came to the conclusion that it was frustration—frustration with the domination of the military over foreign and diplomatic affairs, and the lording of military officers over foreign service officers. Throughout his career “he tried to resist the pressure of the military, but he could not do much about it, and that became frustration.”¹⁹⁴

Okamaru saw the friction that could occur between the consul and military people who visited the office. Oftentimes these people were officers traveling incognito who were passing through and stopped at the consulate to complain about one matter or another. Not infrequently the complaint would lead to an argument, but an unintimidated Katsuno had learned during his many years in China how to handle a troublesome officer. If his size, his loud aggressive voice, and commanding presence in his own consulate did not quiet the complainer, Katsuno let it be known that he was on good terms with one or another officer or commander at higher headquarters who would not be pleased to hear about the officer’s bad behavior.

Dealing with individual uppity officers who appeared at the consulate to make demands was one thing. Katsuno could not do the same toward the military as an organization. Throughout his overseas career (other than his posting to Colombo, Ceylon), Katsuno was stationed where the army was ever present and playing the major role, first in northeast China and now in Songkhla; thus he had to work with the army. Katsuno was not against Japan’s imperialism in China and expansion into Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. What he did not like was the imperious attitude of soldiers, especially when they tried to step on his consulate’s turf and tell him what to do. Katsuno was able to build relationships with army commanders. His friendship with Ushijima was a case in point. He used this as a means for leverage on soldier behavior. Perhaps it was his rough, boisterous, self-confident manner, his kendo aggressiveness, so out of character for a foreign service officer, that helped him earn the respect of military commanders.

Okamaru longed to return to the embassy and Bangkok. For him Songkhla and the consulate had nothing other than reading and mahjong. Although he might understand the consul’s frustration and the appropriateness of his character for the task the consulate had to perform, Okamaru could not respect Katsuno. He lacked refinement; he was loud and boastful, his talk always about China and kendo; and he drank far too much and was usually in varying conditions of inebriation. Finally in the latter part of 1943 Okamaru got his transfer back to the embassy.

Meanwhile, back in mid 1943, another member had joined the consulate staff. He was Tsukamoto Masao, the same Tsukamoto who a year and a half earlier had been the young student attaché carrying the secret document that he handed to Katsuno on 5 December 1941. Twenty-one years old when he

¹⁹⁴ Okamaru interview, 17 Mar 1989.

entered the foreign service in the spring of 1941 after passing the *Gaimushō ryūgakusei*¹⁹⁵ (student attaché) examination, Tsukamoto had been sent to Bangkok that June to study Thai language. He lived with a Thai family; the husband was the doctor at Wachirawut prep school where Tsukamoto studied Thai and joined with the students in their activities. Later he attended Thammasat University and spent time with those students. He enjoyed two years of student life when in mid 1943 the embassy informed him that he was to become regular foreign service staff and would be sent down to the Songkhla consulate as an interpreter.

Tsukamoto joined Katsuno, Nishimaki, Yoneda, Kashwabara and Billy Tobin at the consulate. By this time another local hire, a young man named Tharop, had joined the staff. He was the consulate's "gofer" person doing local errands and deliveries. As the office's interpreter, Tsukamoto accompanied Katsuno when he paid visits on Thai officials, but these were not frequent. Thus he had little work to do, and like the rest of the staff, Tsukamoto accepted the situation. He found Songkhla a pleasant little town. Being able to speak Thai helped him enjoy his assignment. He did not play mahjong, but he liked badminton, and he liked relaxing at the beach with a cool glass of *oliang*. He also filled time with a number of trips to Penang, Tsukamoto noting that he with Nishimaki or others on the staff would drive down there in the consulate's car.

A detachment of Japanese soldiers was stationed in Songkhla that worked at the port. It stevedored the boats that moved in and out of Songkhla carrying commodities and equipment needed by the army. Another detachment, a railroad unit, was stationed in Hādai. It was responsible for servicing the troop trains and feeding the soldiers that stopped to rest in Hādai as they moved up and down the peninsula. Hādai also had a *kempei* unit with a satellite office in Songkhla manned by a single officer.¹⁹⁶

The Final Years

The languid life at the consulate passed from 1943 into 1944. The staff dutifully came to the office each day although they had little work to do. Sometimes Katsuno did not show up at the office. He would go to Hādai to enjoy himself at its eateries and drinking establishments, or simply hang out with Mr. Kōda at the Hādai "satellite office". Occasionally Katsuno did not appear at the office for days, even a week, and staff members would go searching for him. He could be difficult to find because he patronized many establishments in Hādai.¹⁹⁷ One task that fell to Tsukamoto was getting an inebriated Katsuno home, be it from the consulate or after returning from Hādai. The hard part was navigating the stairs up to Katsuno's house which stood on stilts. After getting the consul home, Tsukamoto retreated to his "small pavilion" as he termed his residence that stood next door to Katsuno's.¹⁹⁸

By 1944 it was evident that the war was going poorly for Japan. Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram,

¹⁹⁵ 外務省留学生, literally Foreign Ministry student abroad.

¹⁹⁶ Tsukamoto interview, 8 Aug 1988.

¹⁹⁷ Iguchi interview, 13 Mar 1989.

¹⁹⁸ Tsukamoto interview, 15 May 1988.

who had enthusiastically joined in an alliance with Japan in December 1941, was back peddling in an effort to distance himself and Thailand from Japan. In an effort to show Japan's support for Thailand and to cajole Phibun to maintain his commitment, Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki visited Bangkok in July 1943 where he informed the Thai prime minister that the four Malay states of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, then occupied by the Japanese army and which until 1909 had been part of Thailand (then known as Siam), were to be returned to Thai control. The transfer formally took place in October of 1943.

Phibun accepted the return of the four Malay states but without enthusiasm. As Japan's war situation worsened, political pressure against Phibun grew, and anti-Japanese activity by the Free-Thai movement inside the country increased. Coupled with these was an unpopular Phibun scheme to move the capital from Bangkok to a remote location in the north-central province of Phechibun. In late July 1944 the National Assembly removed Phibun from office, whereupon he fled Bangkok retreating to his military stronghold in Lobpuri, 120 kilometers (75 miles) to the north. The Japanese army command in Thailand under Lieutenant General Nakamura Aketo kept tight control over its troops to prevent any military move against the new government. But the Japanese were not pleased with Phibun's ouster. As difficult as he had become, they still looked upon him as an ally while the new government was seen as neutral at best if not inclined toward the enemy. Nakamura maintained control over the troops under his command, but his authority did not extend to southern Thailand. All Japanese forces on the Malay Peninsula from the Thai provinces of Chumphon and Ranong southward down to Singapore were under the command of the 29th Army headquartered in Taiping, Malaya. A unit under this command stationed in Ranong caused an incident.

Ranong was part of an important Japanese military supply route running from Chumphon on the Gulf of Thailand across the peninsula to Burma (now Myanmar). Upwards to a thousand or more troops were stationed in the province. When it was learned that Phibun had been ousted and a change of government was taking place, a Japanese unit in Ranong, apparently worried about insecurity and the disruption of supply operations, took over government buildings in Ranong town, 475 kilometers (295 miles) south of Bangkok and 378 kilometers (235 miles) north of Songkhla.

In Katsuno's recollection, the incident unfolded around 31 August.¹⁹⁹ He recalled that he learned about it that day from the Thai high commissioner for southern Thailand who came to see Katsuno at the consulate. Then word of the incident came from 29th Army headquarters in Taiping. The message also told Katsuno that the 29th Army's chief of staff, Major General Fujimura Masuzō would be coming to Songkhla to discuss the incident. Thereafter in his recollection, Katsuno said that he, Fujimura and Tsukamoto (as interpreter) went up to Nakhon Si Thammarat to meet with Major General Sēnānarong, commander of Thai forces in the south, but the general was absent. Katsuno then said they met with the Thai chief of staff and after that with a Japanese major general who apparently

¹⁹⁹ The following recollection of the Ranong incident is from Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983.

was in Nakhon Si at the time.²⁰⁰ Then Katsuno, Fujimura and Tsukamoto returned to Songkhla.

A trip from Songkhla to Nakhon Si Thammarat and back as Katsuno described would have taken more than a few days to complete given the poor state of the transportation system by that time in the war. Moreover, Tsukamoto had a different recollection of events. He did not mention going up to Nakhon Si to see the Thai commander.²⁰¹ He recalled that two or three days after news of the incident reached the consulate, he as part of a delegation of officers from the 29th Army headquarters traveled to Ranong town. Katsuno had assigned Tsukamoto to the delegation to be the interpreter and to bring back a report to the consul. Fujimura was not in the delegation,²⁰² and as Tsukamoto recalled, by the time they reached Ranong, the situation had calmed down and Japanese soldiers were no longer occupying the Thai government offices. The delegation was to investigate the incident as well as extend Japan's deepest apologies for the terrible mistake of the soldiers in Ranong and offer the country's heart-felt condolences to the members of the community who had been injured or had family members killed in the incident.²⁰³ The delegation remained in Ranong for a couple of days, then departed for Chumphon. There Tsukamoto informed Katsuno by telegram that he would be heading for Nakhon Si Thammarat, presumably to report about the delegation's activity in Ranong. In Nakhon Si, Tsukamoto and one of the delegation's staff officers met Lieutenant General Shide'i Tsunamasa who apparently was there on temporary assignment as he was in the midst of being transferred from Manchuria to the 29th Army to take command of the 94th Division that was being organized in northern Malaya to defend against an anticipated Allied invasion of the peninsula.

Following the work of the delegation to Ranong, arrangements were made for negotiations between the military authorities in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Taiping to settle the incident. In his recollection of the event, Katsuno said that he offered his opinion to the embassy and the Foreign Ministry. He advised them not to undertake the negotiations in Bangkok between the two governments as that would politicize the incident. It was better to have negotiations take place between the two concerned military authorities.²⁰⁴ In the end that is what happened. Officers from Thai army headquarters in Nakhon Si Thammarat met with those from Japanese army headquarters in Taiping, and they sat down in the town of Alor Star in Malaya to negotiate a settlement. Tsukamoto took part in the negotiations as an interpreter. Ultimately it was agreed that the Japanese would pay compensation to the Thais, and in Katsuno's recollection, the amount was 160,000 baht.²⁰⁵ Later in August following the negotiations, Lieutenant General Nakamura paid a visit to Ranong, a conciliatory gesture to the Thais

²⁰⁰ Katsuno's reference here was possibly to Shide'i Tsunamasa who was in the area at the time, although he was a lieutenant general, not a major general.

²⁰¹ Tsukamoto recollection of the Ranong incident from interviews of 15 May 1988 and 3 Mar 1989.

²⁰² In the interview of 3 Mar 1989, Tsukamoto commented that the chief of staff was too high an officer to head a group like the one that went to Ranong. Tsukamoto thought the leader had been a captain, although this rank seems rather too low for a delegation sent to apologize and express condolences for the Japanese army's mistake.

²⁰³ Katsuno's recollection, in his 28 Mar 1983 interview, was that about 45 Thais had been killed or wounded in the incident.

²⁰⁴ Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983.

²⁰⁵ Equal to \$8,000 at the post-war exchange rate of 20 baht = \$1.00, the rate that prevailed until the 1980s.

as his headquarters in Bangkok had no command authority over the Japanese troops stationed in Ranong.

Another outcome of the Alor Star negotiations was the decision to set up a Thai-Japanese military liaison office at the headquarters of the Thai Sixth Military Region in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Japanese staff officers from the 29th Army were to be posted to the liaison office to communicate and coordinate with the Thai army's southern command. As a newly inducted soldier, Tsukamoto became the interpreter for the newly established liaison office. In October of 1944, two months after his work in Alor Star for the Renong incident negotiations and his return to the Songkhla consulate, Tsukamoto was called up for military service.²⁰⁶ Already known to Japanese army personnel through his work as an interpreter, after his few weeks of basic training in Bangkok, Tsukamoto was assigned to the liaison office in Nakhon Si where he remained until the war ended in August 1945.

Several weeks after Tsukamoto's induction into the army, his replacement arrived at the consulate in Songkhla. He was Iguchi Masayuki, who like Tsukamoto had entered the foreign service as a student attaché.²⁰⁷ He had passed the examination in the summer of 1941. Prior to that, Iguchi had taken a government job after graduating from high school and spent four years in the Japanese mandate islands of the South Pacific, working on Saipan, Palau and other islands, first for the meteorological agency and then in other government positions. In 1940 he returned to Japan. Being jobless he decided to take the Foreign Ministry's student attaché exam which he passed. He then was given the choice to study Vietnamese or Thai. He chose the latter.

In November of 1941 Iguchi left for Thailand arriving in Bangkok on 6 December, only two days before war broke out. The Japanese invasion and the start of war caught him by total surprise. His first reaction was that he would lose his chance to study Thai. But the war had no impact on his life as a student. Like Tsukamoto who was already studying in Bangkok, Iguchi lived with a Thai family. The family head was a teacher at Wachirawut prep school where Iguchi, like Tsukamoto, studied Thai language with a tutor. For close to three years he lived the life of a carefree student; his only job was learning to speak Thai. Then in October of 1944 he was called to the embassy and told he would be sent to the consulate in Songkhla. After arriving at his new assignment, he continued his Thai studies with a local teacher and worked as the consulate's interpreter.

The Ranong incident in August of 1944 and its aftermath had brought a moment of purpose to the Songkhla consulate. But with the settlement of the incident, the consulate drifted back into its previous languid, largely workless state. By the start of 1945, the war was going badly for Japan. For Songkhla, and Thailand as a whole, food and daily necessities were sufficiently available, but imported goods had disappeared from the economy. For Katsuno, Nishimaki and others on the staff who enjoyed their liquor, the only item available was *Maekhong*, the domestically produced and much less palatable whiskey. Shipments continued of tin, rubber and other local commodities from Songkhla, but were

²⁰⁶ Tsukamoto never forgot the date of his induction, 10 October 1944. (Tsukamoto interview, 8 Aug 1988)

²⁰⁷ Information about Iguchi from Iguchi interview, 13 Mar 1989.

considerably hampered by the lack of boats and exacerbated by a number of Allied air raids on the harbor facilities. Another sign of the deteriorating situation was the tumbling value of the military scrip currency that the Japanese army had introduced in Malaya. It had come into usage amongst the local Chinese merchants in Hād̄yai who did business in Malaya. Over the course of 1945, the value of Malaya's military scrip plummeted vis-à-vis the Thai baht. Katsuno's Chinese acquaintances in Hād̄yai started referring to it as "bad smelling" money, a play on the fact that the scrip had the image of a palm tree printed on it, and palm oil when it became rancid, was "bad smelling."²⁰⁸

In July of 1945, Nishimaki, the consulate's number-two man, received instructions reassigning him to the embassy in Bangkok. Along with Kashiwabara and Tobina, Nishimaki was among the longest serving members of the consulate staff. Getting to Bangkok from Songkhla, however, was no longer just a one-day train ride from Hād̄yai on the international express. The railway between Malaya and Bangkok had been ravaged by air raids and was no longer functioning. A boat trip from Songkhla to Bangkok was now open to Allied air attacks and exceedingly dangerous. The best option for Nishimaki was to travel by car to Penang where he could catch a military flight.²⁰⁹ He finally was able to get one to Saigon. From there Nishimaki made his way to Phnom Penh where a friend was stationed. No immediate transportation was available to Bangkok, so Nishimaki had to remain in Phnom Penh. While waiting, the friend suggested that the two could use the time to visit Angkor Wat which Nishimaki had never seen. The date was now around the 8th or 9th of August. It was a bad, even dangerous time for Japanese. From the news, they knew that the war was on Japan's doorstep. In Nishimaki's mind it was no time for a sightseeing trip. Eventually he managed to get to Bangkok aboard a military train. He recalled that he arrived at night and a blackout was in effect. The only place to stay in Bangkok that he knew about was the Trocadero Hotel where he had put up when he first arrived in Bangkok in July of 1941. He took a *samlaw* (trishaw) to the hotel. For the remainder of his foreign service tour in Thailand, Nishimaki resided at the Trocadero and commuted each day to the embassy. This continued for about a month after the war ended until all embassy staff were ordered to take what belongings they could carry and move to locations prepared for their internment.

Meanwhile at the consulate in Songkhla word came that the war was ending and that on 15 August the Emperor would be making a most-important radio broadcast. The 15th came but no one on the consulate staff heard the broadcast. Katsuno and several staff members had gone to hear the broadcast in Hād̄yai, which is at a higher elevation than Songkhla, but they too were unable to pick up the broadcast. A message from the embassy clarified that Japan had surrendered and accepted the Allied terms which the Emperor's broadcast had officially confirmed.

At the consulate feelings of regret were mixed with ones of relief that the war was over and all on the staff were alive and well. And suddenly with the surrender and the Emperor's broadcast, the consulate ceased functioning. Kashiwabara, Tobina and the locally hired workers on the staff were released. By

²⁰⁸ Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983.

²⁰⁹ Information about Nishimaki's journey to Bangkok from Nishimaki interview, 30 Mar 1983.

mid-September Tsukamoto had returned to the consulate. With the end of the war, all soldiers who had been called up in country for military service were released from duty and told to return to their previous places of employment. Yonda, too, had apparently been inducted as he also returned after being away from the consulate. With their return and the departure of the locally hired staff, those remaining at the consulate were the regular foreign service people: Katsuno, Yoneda, Tsukamoto, and Iguchi. In Hādyaï, Kōda continued manning the consulate's satellite office. The next step was awaiting a directive from the embassy or Foreign Ministry telling them what their next moves were to be.

Weeks passed; September came and then October with no directive from Bangkok or Tokyo. The "staff of four" came to the office each day as usual. There was no work, so they played four-man baseball, badminton, cards, read books, went to Hādyaï. They were free to come and go as they liked with no feelings of threat or danger. Only one incident happened; it was in Hādyaï. Katsuno and Iguchi were visiting the satellite office. They had gone out and were returning when the Chinese maid at the office shouted loudly to them. Just then a Thai policeman came out of the office. While Katsuno and Iguchi were out, two policemen had come in and occupied the office, and now one of them emerged and rushed at Katsuno. The consul was carrying his kendo stick. He quickly raised it and struck the policeman knocking him to the ground. The second policeman, seeing his partner struck and knocked down, fled from the office. Katsuno hauled the stunned officer into the office and had Iguchi tell him that he was supposed to be protecting the Japanese. The policeman was apparently drunk. He left the office but soon reappeared a rifle in hand with fixed bayonet. Iguchi started running up the stairs. Katsuno ran into another room. Suddenly he heard Iguchi shouting, "Consul! Consul!" Katsuno came out of the room carrying his kendo stick. He saw Iguchi on the stairs. The policeman had stabbed him with the bayonet; his white shirt was all bloody. Katsuno swung his kendo stick striking the policeman on the back of the shoulders. The policeman started to run away, but Katsuno caught him with another hit that knocked him down. Katsuno then hauled the prostrate policeman outside. According to Katsuno, he stood over the policeman, his kendo stick resting on the man's belt while on the street a crowd of local Chinese gathered and looked on with admiration and approval.²¹⁰

Iguchi's shirt had blood all over, but the wound was superficial. The policeman had been very drunk and his bayonet thrust had only grazed Iguchi's right side. After the wound had been treated, Katsuno and Iguchi visited the Hādyaï chief of police to protest. Although the war had ended and Japan defeated, the consulate staff still had diplomatic immunity, and an attack like that by the policeman should never have happened. The police chief responded that the consulate should keep a pistol at the Hādyaï office and shoot any threatening person who came in. In effect the chief was telling the consulate staff to protect themselves.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Description of Hādyaï incident from Katsuno interview, 28 Mar 1983. At the time Kōda was apparently not at the office as neither Katsuno nor Iguchi mentioned him being present when the incident took place.

²¹¹ Iguchi interview, 13 Mar 1989. Iguchi recalled that he heard the policeman whom Katsuno had struck died about a month after the incident.

November was approaching; still no directive came from the embassy. The consulate was now financially strapped. Since the end of the war, all funding from Bangkok had stopped. Eventually all the money at the consulate and the staff's personal funds ran out. In Hādyai Kōda talked with his local Chinese business friends about the financial straits at the consulate. When the money had run out, a local merchant came to Kōda and said that he and a group of his colleagues had benefited from Katsuno's good relations with the local Chinese business community, and had relied on his intercession with the Japanese business community and the military. Now with the consul and his staff in difficulty, they would provide the funds the consulate needed. Here was clear indication of the impact that Katsuno had had on merchants in Hādyai. The staff would sustain themselves on these funds from the Hādyai merchants for the remainder of their stay in Songkhla.²¹²

Katsuno was grateful that his business acquaintances in Hādyai were ready to help, but three months had passed and he was upset that the embassy had seemingly left him and his staff orphaned in Songkhla. He talked to the staff about going to Bangkok, which was now a difficult journey, to find out what was happening and to get money. All agreed that Katsuno should go. He departed but would not return. On reaching the embassy, he would be detained and told not to leave Bangkok.

As Katsuno was making his way to Bangkok, a shift had commenced in the situation of the Japanese nationals in Thailand. The Allies had been preparing for their internment, and the first step began in October with the restriction of their movement to the places they were in. For the staff at the Songkhla consulate, that meant no more freedom to leave the consulate compound. Kōda in Hādyai had to close the satellite office and join his colleagues Yoneda, Tsukamoto and Iguchi in Songkhla. From then on Thai policemen stood guard outside the consulate gate, and no one inside was allowed to leave.²¹³ Next some British soldiers showed up and announced that they had come to confiscate everything that belonged to the consulate. This led to an argument. Yoneda, a fluent speaker of English, spoke for the Japanese. He told the soldiers that the consulate was a diplomatic mission, that no instructions had come from the Japanese or British government saying that its diplomatic status had changed. That being the case, the staff could never allow anything to be removed from the building. Apparently Yoneda's argument caught the soldiers by surprise as it caused them to pause then leave the consulate. Some days later an official from the British consulate showed up. He told the staff that he would be "sealing" everything on the premises and nothing was to be removed. The official then proceeded to stick seals on all the desks, chairs, cabinets, office equipment, kitchen utensils and appliances, everything including the consulate car. On the seals was a statement indicating that the labeled items were no longer the property of the Japanese consulate. As he departed, the official reiterated that all the things he had sealed were not to be removed from the consulate. Another change was the removal of the golden chrysanthemum, Japan's coat-of-arms, from the front of the building, and the Japanese flag

²¹² Information about funds coming from Hādyai merchants in Iguchi interview, 13 Mar 1989.

²¹³ Information about the staff's internment in the consulate compound from Tsukamoto interviews, 15 May and 8 Aug 1988; Iguchi interview 13 Mar 1989.

could no longer be displayed.

No longer free to move about, their leader no longer present, and no communication from Bangkok, the four Songkhla orphans waited, filling each day with conversation, reading, four-man baseball, badminton and playing cards; the four were similar in age and got along well together. They were not harassed by the guards or passers-by on the street. In fact, never during nor after the war did the consulate staff ever feel threatened by the local people or authorities. Once confined to the compound, their only contacts with the outside were the cook who came to make their meals and the delivery people who brought food and other daily necessities to the consulate. This life of waiting, of filling time with no work to do continued into December 1945 when a telegram arrived from the embassy telling the four that they were to vacate the consulate taking only their personal belongings and were to come to the embassy in Bangkok. Arrangements were made for their passage aboard a Thai steamer, and the four departed for Bangkok.

The saga of the Imperial Japanese Consulate at Songkhla had reached its denouement; but not the story of the consul and the rest of the consulate's staff. In October Katsuno had made his way to Bangkok to find out what the embassy's intentions were and to get money. He fully expected to return to Songkhla. But by the time he reached Bangkok, the situation for the Japanese had changed. They were now to be confined to specific locations and interned until they could be repatriated to Japan. On reaching the embassy Katusno was told he could not leave, and he along with most of the other foreign service personnel were henceforth confined to the compound of the Japanese ambassador's residence on Phetburi Road. A smaller group which included Nishimaki Torao was confined to a compound of about five houses not far from the ambassador's residential compound. At the same time, foreign service people stationed at the consulates in Songkhla and Chiang Mai were likewise being confined to their consulate compounds. But the bulk of the Japanese nationals would be sent to a hastily built internment camp in Nonthaburi province in the district of Bang Buathong,²¹⁴ 20 kilometer (13 miles) north of Bangkok. The majority of these nationals were in Thailand working for Japanese companies and were with their families, but they also included long-time residents in the country, among whom were Seto Hisao's wife Teru and son Masao. Seto himself was arrested and sent to Chengi Prison in Singapore to stand trial for possible war crimes; he would spend two years in prison (after which he was repatriated to Japan never to return to Thailand).²¹⁵

The foreign service people interned at the ambassador's residential compound, among whom was Tsukamoto, were quite comfortable. It was a spacious compound where they even could practice golf. Nishimaki's nearby compound of some five houses lacked the same spaciousness. Moreover, he experienced a break-in by a group of Australian soldiers who proceeded to rob him and many others of the little money they had. The Thai guards at the gate did nothing to prevent the break-in and robbery. Otherwise life for the people interned in these compounds was sufficiently comfortable. They idled

²¹⁴ Bāng Buathawng (บางบัวทอง).

²¹⁵ Seto interview, 13 Aug 1983. Seto said his father was never allowed to return to Thailand.

away time doing various activities and pastimes, everyone waiting for news of when they would be returning to Japan. For the bulk of the Japanese interned at the camp in Bang Buathong, life was quite different. It was primitive. They had been expats living with maids and flush toilets. Now they had been moved out to the countryside into one-room huts with thatched roofs; there was no running water and only outdoor toilets. The best they could do was make the camp as comfortable as they could and await their repatriation to Japan.

For the Japanese foreign service people, the end of internment came in June 1946. Word came that a ship, a *hikiage-sen* (引き揚げ船 repatriation ship) was being dispatched from Japan to Bangkok. Tsukamoto always remembered the name of that ship, the Tatsuhi-maru.²¹⁶ In late June all foreign service people departed for Japan aboard that ship. They arrived at the port of Kagoshima where they had their first sight of the massive devastation the homeland had suffered during the war. It was a shock after experiencing Thailand and its limited war damage.

Although the overseas offices of Japan's Foreign Ministry ceased functioning during the Allied occupation, foreign service personnel remained with the ministry. For most of them, the war years drifted into the past. They looked to the future, especially the young officers like Nishimaki, Tsukamoto and Iguchi, when Japan would reopen its embassies and consulates, and they would again represent their country abroad. But the legacy of the war would follow Consul Katsuno Toshio and his interpreter Iwasaki Yōji.

In late 1946, six months after their return to Japan, Katsuno and Iwasaki were summoned to Tokyo for questioning about the December 1941 incident in Songkhla. At the end of his 1982 reminiscence, Katsuno simply states that in January 1947, he was sent to Sugamo Prison and then on to Chengi Prison in Singapore as a war-crime suspect. Half a year later, on the last day of June 1947, he was released and returned to Japan.

Iwasaki wrote about his experience in his book.²¹⁷ He was incarcerated in Sugamo Prison in December 1946. Ten days after his imprisonment, he was interrogated by two British army officers, a major and a captain. Iwasaki had heard that the captain was the son of a British father and Japanese mother. He had grown up in Japan and had graduated from Yamaguchi Commercial High School. The primary aim of the interrogation was to ascertain Iwasaki's criminality in the Songkhla incident when several British operatives had been summarily executed by the Japanese army in the first days of the Malaya invasion in December 1941. At the time of the incident, Katsuno and Iwasaki were in Nakhon Si Thammarat investigating the killing of a number of Japanese company workers (as narrated earlier²¹⁸). Iwasaki's interrogators sought to implicate him in the Songkhla incident by linking it with

²¹⁶ 辰日丸. (Tsukamoto interview, 15 May 1988)

Built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in their Hiroshima shipyard, construction of the Tatsuhi-maru began in November 1944 and was completed in March 1945. At the time it was sent to Bangkok to repatriate Japanese, the ship was owned by the shipping company Nai-Gai Kisen K.K. (内外汽船株式会社).

²¹⁷ Iwasaki, pp. 31–50.

²¹⁸ See p. 46.

the killings in Nakhon Si, the interrogators claiming that the executions of the British agents in Songkhla were reprisal killings for the Japanese killed in Nakhon Si. Iwasaki did not say how long his interrogation lasted, but it concluded with the interrogators deciding that he was just “small fry”. They were looking for the “big fish” in the incident. Another aim of the interrogation, which Iwasaki found interesting, was the whereabouts of Tsuji Masanobu. Along with being the chief planner of the Malaya invasion, he had been involved in the Japanese roundup and executions of Chinese in Singapore after its capture. At war’s end he was in Bangkok when he disappeared, and the British were undertaking an all-out search for him. If Iwasaki could provide information about Tsuji’s whereabouts, his interrogators told him he would be released from prison. Iwasaki had no such information. He assumed that Tsuji had committed suicide. At the end of the interrogation, the two officers concluded that Iwasaki’s status had been too low to be connected with the incident in Songkhla. As they were leaving, they indicated that he ought to be released soon and allowed to go home. With those hopeful words, Iwasaki was taken back to the cell he shared with a number of other prisoners. Thereafter he heard nothing more.

About a month and a half later, Iwasaki was suddenly roused out of his sleep at 2 o’clock in the morning. An M.P. was shouting at him with a big grin on his face telling him he was free. With the M.P. urging him along, Iwasaki grabbed his belongings as hastily as he could. He exchanged hurried parting words with others in the room as he left the cell. Out on the walkway Iwasaki saw dozens of other prisoners lined up on each of the prison’s tiers. The premonition suddenly hit him that instead of being freed, he was headed for Singapore and Chengi Prison, and that is what happened. He and around 70 other prisoners were led outside. Everyone was handcuffed then taken to Tokyo Station. Eventually they were loaded onto a prison train where they spent one night as the train made its way to Kure city in Hiroshima prefecture. At Kure port they boarded a British military transport and set sail for Singapore. On the ship they were treated like war criminals, getting hit, kicked, punched and deprived of sleep.

Writing about his time at Chengi, Iwasaki said much about how the war crimes court and its trials were not justice. They were the victor’s way of getting revenge on the loser. Like himself, many at Sugamo and Chengi had simply been swept up and incarcerated. The victorious Allies had cast a very wide net and arrested anyone with seemingly any connection with an incident termed a war crime. He named and described a number of unfortunates he came to know in Chengi whom he saw led off for execution. But he never mentioned himself being interrogated or put on trial. From this, one can conclude that he never was brought before the court at Chengi. Iwasaki also never mentioned Katsuno. It is likely that he too was never put on trial. In the end both simply said they were released, Katsuno at the very end of June and Iwasaki in July 1947.

After returning to Japan, Katsuno Toshio, former consul in Songkhla, Thailand, continued as an official in the Foreign Office. For the duration of the Allied occupation of Japan, the country had no missions overseas, but Katsuno, like other foreign service officials, was employed at the ports handling

the arrivals and departures of foreigners. Some years later when Katsuno was head of the immigration office in Osaka, he had the chance to meet Alan Oldham again. From 1953 to 1956, after Japan had resumed diplomatic relations with the world, Oldham was posted as Britain's consul-general in Osaka. As for Iwasaki Yōji, he returned to his home in Saeki city, Oita prefecture, where he would take over the family charcoal production and sales business. He would have fond memories of his time in Thailand but never visit it again. Katsuno Toshio retired to Sakai City just north of Osaka where he had bought a home. He was living there with his son's family when he passed away in the summer of 1983 at the age of 92.

Conclusion

Imperial Japan's consulate in Songkhla was established by the Foreign Ministry at the behest of the military. From the ministry's standpoint, there was no need for a consulate in southern Thailand as few Japanese nationals or expatriates were working or living in the south. The Japanese military on the other hand was drawing up plans for a potential invasion of the Malay Peninsula and war against Britain to capture Singapore. Military planners needed information about southern Thailand and British Malaya. They looked upon a consulate established in Songkhla as a base through which information could be gathered and sent on to higher authorities in Saigon and Tokyo.

The sources available to this study did not say when the Japanese legation in Bangkok asked someone in Songkhla to find a building suitable for use as a consulate. Possibly it was not until the beginning of 1941 that such a request was sent. The sources also do not say whom the legation contacted in Songkhla to locate a building, but in all likelihood that person had been Dr. Seto Hisao, the most prominent expatriate Japanese in Songkhla who had been providing information to the Japanese military since the latter half of the 1930s.

Also unclear is the reason for Katsuno Toshio's selection as consul, but the evidence in the sources suggests that his posting to Songkhla was not simply the result of a routine change of assignment. Katsuno was atypical for a foreign service officer. Loud, boastful, self-confident and light on the civil refinements usually seen in a diplomat; a heavy drinker always ready to enjoy a party with plenty of food and alcohol; able to hobnob with military commanders but also ready to cross kendo swords with a pushy, arrogant officer who would challenge him or his consular authority. During his many years in China, Katsuno acquired a reputation of not being intimidated by soldiers which enabled him to cooperate with military authorities while standing firm on his consular authority. Apparently this reputation and ability were factors for Katsuno's selection. The Songkhla consulate would be an espionage center, thus the military would get involved in its operation. The Foreign Ministry needed someone heading the consulate who could maintain the Foreign Ministry's authority against military pressure.

A factor that the Foreign Ministry probably did not consider in its selection but which served Katsuno well during his Songkhla posting was his ability to speak Chinese. Katsuno was not an old China hand nor scholar on China. He learned his Chinese in the course of his consular work. His

ability to communicate fluently in Chinese gave him an affinity with the local Chinese in Hādai and Songkhla and confidence as a middleman and negotiator between Chinese and Japanese. As consul in Songkhla, he apparently fulfilled this role superbly. He got all the cooperation he needed from the local Chinese. He ran into no anti-Japanese obstructionist or non-cooperative activity to the consulate's work or operations. He promoted his relations with the local Chinese by regularly patronizing their shops, restaurants and drinking establishments; by praying at their temples and taking part in their festivals; and in these endeavors, he took along staff members of the consulate. Nishimaki Torao, the consulate's chief administrative secretary, was effusive in his praise for Katsuno's success with the local Chinese. He credited the consul with single-handedly smoothing relations between Japanese and Chinese, especially in the Hādai area. Nishimaki also maintained that Katsuno would step in to smooth differences between the local Chinese and the Japanese military; he would protect the former from the latter.

The consulate opened on the 1st of April 1941. During the next eight months until the Japanese invasion took place, it functioned principally as a spy center as there was little activity that fell into the category of consular work. Two of its clerks, majors Ōzone and Kuboki, were actually intelligence agents assigned to the consulate by the military to gather information. They would later be joined by a third, Captain Inobe, a graduate of *Nakano Gakkō*, the Army's newly established intelligence training center. In addition to these three were the ongoing visitors to the consulate, most of whom were military agents dressed as civilians and oftentimes posing as employees of one Japanese company or another that had operations in southern Thailand. In addition to the intelligence agents placed in the consulate by the army, Consul Katsuno was likewise involved in collecting information, relying on his Chinese language and the connections he acquired with some members in the local Chinese community. He proudly thought that in his opinion, the intelligence he gathered through his connections was much superior to that gathered by the others in the consulate. Arguably he could have been correct. None of the three army intelligence agents in the consulate knew a foreign language. They relied on their own observations and on the Japanese expatriates who had long resided in the south, some of whom had also lived in Malaya. Katsuno was the only one who had sources that could go into Malaya and bring back information. During the eight months before the outbreak of war, a good deal of intelligence was sent from the consulate to the Japanese military. It is not known how much or what specific pieces of this information found its way into preparations for the Malaya invasion, but presumably it did have an impact on planning.

In late November 1941 Katsuno was called to the embassy in Bangkok. On the 1st of December he learned that war was about to begin, and the army would be landing at Songkhla on either the 5th or the 8th. Katsuno got back to Songkhla on the 3rd. It was possible that war would begin in just two days. From Bangkok he had brought back a machine gun, hand grenades and a radio. The first two were for the consulate's self-defense; the radio was for communicating with the approaching invasion fleet. On the 5th, student attaché Tsukamoto arrived at the consulate bringing a very important docu-

ment. Unbeknownst to him, it was a new codebook to be used to communicate with the fleet. Unfortunately, Katsuno and the soldiers on his staff had discovered that the radio brought from Bangkok had come with no battery rendering it unusable. This negates the accepted reason (apparently proffered by Tsuji Masanobu) for the consulate's failure to contact the fleet, that it had been due to an agitated Major Ōzone who, fearing the British might occupy Songkhla in advance, had prematurely burned the codebook to prevent it falling into British hands. In fact, the codebook lay securely locked away in the consulate safe. The lack of a battery, not the loss of the codebook, had prevented communication with the fleet.

Unable to get in contact with the approaching fleet but with the likely date of the invasion being the 8th, Katsuno with the concurrence of his three soldiers decided that the Japanese consulate staff (which excluded local hires) would remain at the consulate. It was a time of high uncertainty and danger; the consulate was being watched by the Thai police; for the safety of the Japanese staff, Katsuno wanted them to remain inside the consulate and its compound. On the night of the 7th and into the morning of the 8th the staff remained awake. They passed the hours with talk, with food and drink prepared by the Japanese cook whom Katsuno had brought from Bangkok, and with practice learning how to throw hand grenades. Katsuno eventually returned to his residence but instructed all of the others to remain inside the consulate.

When the invasion began, Lieutenant Colonel Tsuji Masanobu and his orderly were the first Japanese soldiers to reach the consulate. But unlike Tsuji's claim in his book that he awoke everyone including the consul with his banging at the front gate, the consulate staff was not asleep, and Katsuno was not the first person to meet him. The staff was well awake and heard Tsuji's call from the front. Itō, then Major Kuboki, ran to fetch Katsuno from his house. In due course he arrived at the consulate, and having consumed a goodly amount of alcohol only a few hours earlier, was in some state of inebriation. After a quick greeting, Katsuno, Tsuji, his orderly, Inobe and Iwasaki left in the consulate's car. They drove to the Thai national police compound, although stories differ on the path taken to the compound. Hopes of negotiating with the police to prevent a clash with the incoming Japanese proved futile. Although Yamashita's forces had reason to believe that the Thais would not obstruct their passage through Thai territory to Malaya, Thai police and military forces had standing orders to resist any invader. Thai resistance continued until the late morning of December 8th when cease-fire orders came from Bangkok following negotiations between Phibunsongkhram, Thai Prime Minister and Supreme Commander, and Japanese Ambassador Tsubokami Teiji.

Thereafter the course of Japan's Malaya invasion unfolded. On 31 January 1942 the last of the British forces defending Malaya withdrew to Singapore. Two weeks later Singapore was captured, and the British surrendered on February 15th, 69 days after the invasion began. With the Japanese victory, the *raison d'être* of the Songkhla consulate ceased. The heady days of spying and espionage were over; the need to collect intelligence had ended. The consulate operated throughout the war, but by mid 1942 Consul Katsuno had little more than perfunctory work and ceremonial functions to fulfill. His

The Imperial Japanese Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand

consulate along with Songkhla, where the war in Southeast Asia had started, were largely forgotten in the backwaters of the war. In December 1945 the consulate was closed and the last of the staff withdrawn to Bangkok, ending the saga of the Imperial Japanese Consulate at Songkhla.

Maps

Provinces in Southern Thailand
within the Jurisdiction of the Japanese Songkhla Consulate



The Imperial Japanese Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand

Locations Named in the Story Text

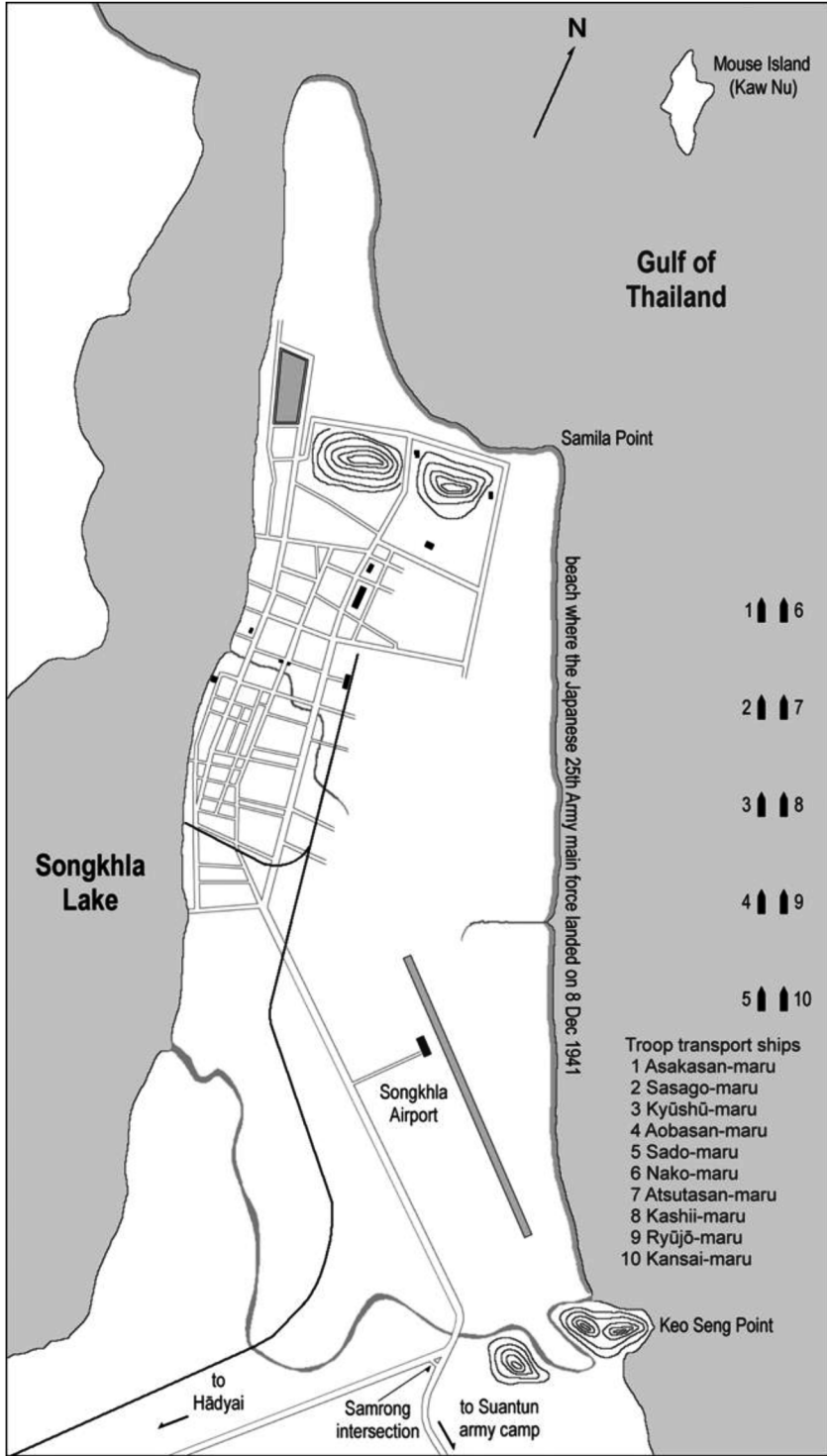


Songkhla—Hadyai Region of Southern Thailand

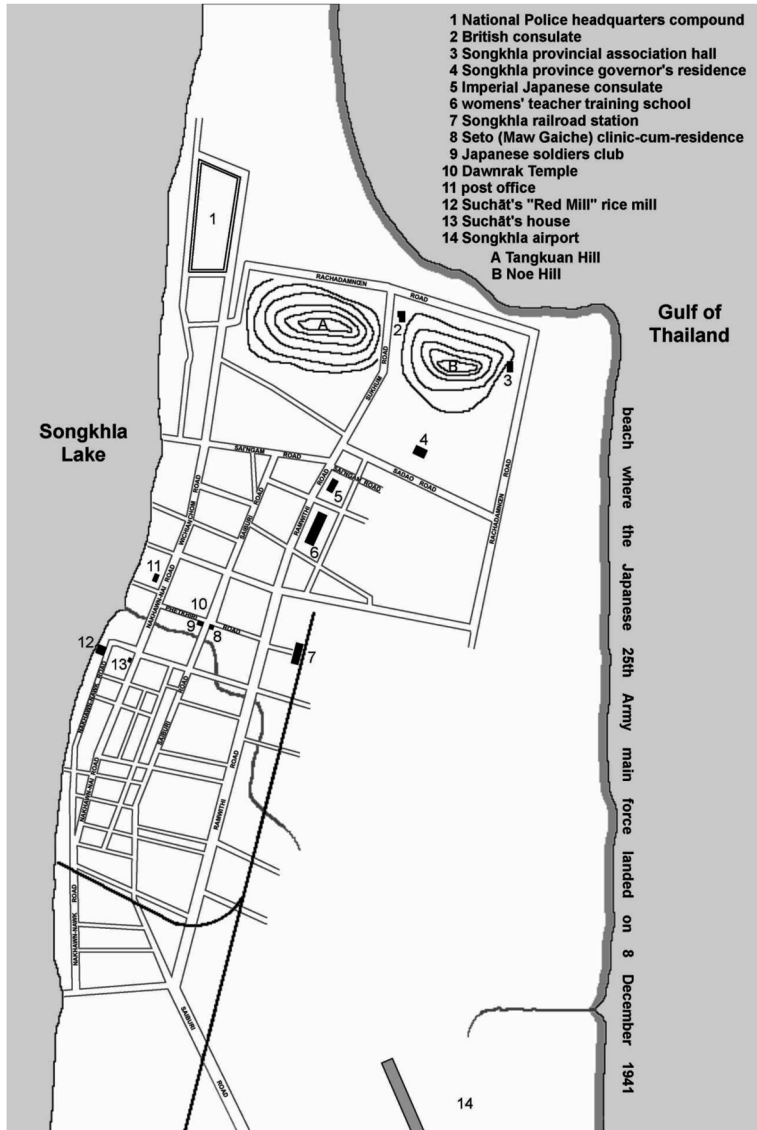


The Imperial Japanese Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand

Songkhla and the Landing Beach
of the Japanese 25th Army main force on 8 December 1941

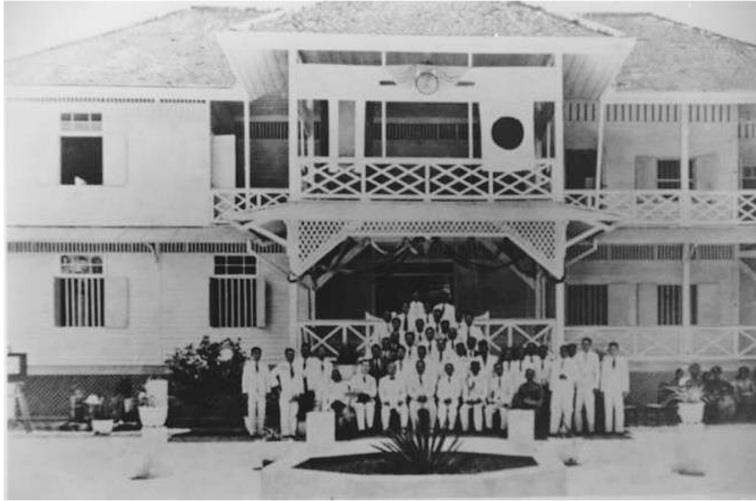


Songkhla Town and Locations Cited in the Story Text



The Imperial Japanese Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand

Photos



Imperial Japanese Consulate at Songkhla (opening ceremony on 1 April 1941)
(photo from *Thai ni ikite* by Seto Masao)



The dilapidated Hotel Sænsamrån (meaning Hotel of Infinite Happiness)
Once the Japanese consulate in Songkhla
(photo by the author, Sep 1983)

William L. Swan



The British consulate in Songkhla, 1922
(photo from the Internet)



Alan Trevor Oldham
1904-1971
British consul in Songkhla in 1941
(photo from ancestry.com)

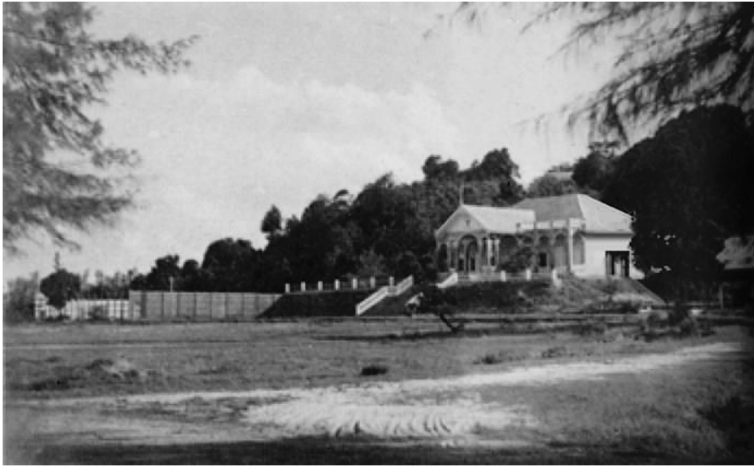
The Imperial Japanese Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand



Seto family residence and clinic of Maw Gaiche (circa late 1930s)
(photo from *Living in Thailand* by Seto Masao)



The former Seto family home and clinic of Maw Gaiche as it stood in 1983
(photo by the author, Sep 1983)



The Songkhla Provincial Association Hall, 1936
(photo from the Internet)



The Songkhla Provincial Association Hall in 2006
(photo by the author, Feb 2006)

The Imperial Japanese Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand



Photo by NHK Japanese news service of Japanese landing on Songkhla beach
(Kao Seng Point toward left in the distance)
(photo from the Internet)



Beach at Songkhla where the Japanese army landed on 8 December 1941
(Kao Seng Point in the distance at left)
(photo by the author, Jan 1968)



Suchāt's Haphōhin Rice Mill, known locally as the "Red Mill"
(photo by the author, Sep 1983)

Persons Named in the Story Text

Amada Rokurō (天田六朗)

a consul and interpreter at the Japanese legation, later embassy, in Bangkok

Asada Shunsuke (浅田俊介)

consul-general at the Japanese legation, later embassy, in Bangkok

Fujimura Masuzō (藤村益蔵)

major general in the Imperial Japanese Army at the time of his posting to Malaya in 1944

Fujiwara Iwaichi (藤原岩市)

major in the Imperial Japanese Army and head of the *Fujiwara Kikan* intelligence group during the war

Futami Yasusato (二見甚郷)

Japanese minister to Thailand May until Aug. 1941 when Tsubokami arrived as first Japanese ambassador

Hayashi Tadahiko (林忠彦)

major in the Imperial Japanese Army at the time of the Malaya invasion

Hongō Takeshi (本郷健)

lieutenant colonel in the Imperial Japanese Army at the time of the Malaya invasion

Ichikawa Tadashi (市川正)

Army major at the time of the Malaya invasion, commanded the special spearhead detachment to lead invasion

Iguch Masayuki (井口昌幸)

interpreter at the Songkhla consulate from Nov. 1944 to Aug. 1945

Inobe Jūchin (伊野部重珍)

captain in the Imperial Japanese Army at the time of his posting to the Songkhla consulate in Oct. 1941

Itō Keisuke (伊東敬介)

member of the Songkhla consulate staff from Jul. to Dec. 1941

Iwasaki Yōji (岩崎陽二)

interpreter at the Japanese consulate from Jul. 1941 to Feb. 1942

Jinda Udomakson (จินดา อุดมอักษร)

Chinese-Thai businessman in Songkhla and Hādyai

Kashiwabara Tsuyoshi (柏原剛)

member of the Songkhla consulate staff from Apr. 1941 to Aug. 1945

Katsuno Toshio (勝野敏夫)

Japanese consul in Songkhla from Mar. 1941 to Aug. 1945

Kōda ??? (黄田 ??), Chinese name Huáng Bǐngdīng (黄丙丁)

Songkhla consulate staff member who manned the consulate's Hādyai satellite office

Kuboki ??? (窪木 ??), alias Ishii Tarō (石居太郎)

major in the Imperial Japanese Army at the time of his posting to the Songkhla consulate in 1941

Mon Jarcoensin (มัน เจริญสิน)

driver for the Songkhla consulate

Nakamura Aketo (中村明人)

Imperial Japanese Army lieutenant general and commander of the Japanese garrison forces in Thailand 1943–1945

Nishimaki Torao (西牧寅夫)

chief administrative secretary of the Japanese Songkhla consulate Jul. 1941 to Jul. 1945

Nishino Junjirō (西野順治郎)

interpreter at the Japanese legation, later embassy, in Bangkok; transferred to the consulate in Chiangmai

Okamaru Shōji (岡丸正二)

member of the Songkhla consulate staff for about half a year in 1943

Okamoto Suemasa (岡本季正)

Japanese consul-general posted to Singapore at the start of Dec. 1941, interned by the British upon his arrival

Ōkawa Shūmei (大川周明)

Japanese scholar and nationalist, founder of *Ōkawa Juku* school

Oldham, Alan Trevor

British consul in Songkhla at the time of the Malaya invasion

Ōzone Yoshihiko (大曾根義彦), alias Gotō Saburō (後藤三郎)

major in the Imperial Japanese Army at the time of his posting to the Songkhla consulate in 1941

Phon Muttāmon (พล มุตตามร)

Songkhla district officer at the time of the Malaya invasion

Phoemsak Kuntharō (เพิ่มศักดิ์ กุณฑโร)

police corporal stationed at the national police headquarters in Songkhla in 1941

Plæk Silapakamphisēt (แปลก ศิลปกรรมพิเศษ)

Songkhla provincial education officer at the time of the Malaya invasion

(Luang) Sēnānarong (หลวงเสนานรงค์)

commander of Thai Army forces on peninsular Thailand in 1941

Seto Hisao (瀬戸久夫)

prominent Japanese expatriate in Songkhla 1935–1941, operated a pharmacy-cum-clinic

Seto Masao (瀬戸正夫)

Seto Hisao's son

Shiba Gi'ichi (芝儀一)

doctor and Japanese expatriate living in Narathiwat in 1941

Shide'i Tsunamasa (四手井綱正)

lieutenant general in the Imperial Japanese Army and commander of a division in northern Malay in 1945; was in Nakhon Si Thammarat in Sep. 1944

Suchāt Ratanaprakān (สุชาติ รัตนประการ)

businessman and prominent citizen in Songkhla

Tamura Hiroshi (田村浩)

Army colonel and military attaché at the Japanese legation, later embassy, in Bangkok in 1941

Tsubokami Teiji (坪上貞二)

first Japanese ambassador to Thailand Sep. 1941 to Sep. 1944

Tsuji Masanobu (辻政信)

lieutenant colonel in the Imperial Japanese Army when his Malaya invasion plan was executed in Dec. 1941–Feb. 1942

Tsukamoto Masao (塚本政雄)

interpreter at the Songkhla consulate Jul. 1943 to Oct. 1944

Ushijima Keijirō (牛島啓次郎)

former Japanese Army commander in China and friend of Katsuno Toshio

Yasuda Ei'ichi (保田英一)

head of the Mitsui Steamship Company office in Bangkok in 1941

Japanese Ships Involved in the Songkhla Landing Operation

Troop Transports carrying 25th Army main force (numbered as shown on map on p. 69)

1. Asakasan-maru (淺香山丸)

Built by Mitsui at its shipbuilding division's Tamano shipyard in Okayama prefecture for the

Mitsui Steamship Co.²¹⁹; construction completed in Sep. 1937; requisitioned by the Japanese Imperial Army in Oct. 1941 for use as a military transport; attacked by British aircraft and sunk on 27 Feb. 1943 while anchored off the Burma coast near Moulmein to unload supplies.

2. Sasago-maru (笹子丸)

Built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries²²⁰ at its Yokohama shipyard for NYK²²¹; construction completed in Jun. 1941; in Jul. requisitioned by the Japanese Imperial Army for use as a military transport; attacked and sunk on 15 Oct. 1942 by U.S. aircraft.

3. Kyūshū-maru (九州丸)

Built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries²²⁰ at its Nagasaki shipyard for the Harada Steamship Co.²²²; construction completed in May 1938; requisitioned by the Japanese Imperial Army in Nov. 1941 for use as a military transport; attacked by U.S. aircraft on 15 Oct. 1942 while anchored off the coast of Guadalcanal Island just north of the Umasani River estuary; destroyed by fire and explosions, it settled aground in shallow water and was abandoned.

4. Aobasan-maru (青葉山丸)

Built by Mitsui at its shipping division in Tamano, Okayama prefecture, for Mitsui Steamship Co.²¹⁹; construction completed Mar. 1935; requisitioned by the Japanese Imperial Army in Jul. 1941 for use as a military transport; sunk by U.S. aircraft on 30 Dec. 1944 while anchored off San Fernando on the west coast of Luzon Island, Philippines, while unloading troops and equipment.

5. Sado-maru (佐渡丸)

Built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries²²⁰ at its Nagasaki shipyard for NYK²²¹; construction completed in Jun. 1939; requisitioned by the Japanese Imperial Army in Feb. 1941 and fitted with anti-aircraft guns to serve as an armed military transport augmenting convoy air defense; sunk on 18 Nov. 1942 by U.S. aircraft while anchored at Elementa at the southern end of Bougainville Island.

6. Nako-maru (那古丸)

Built by the Uraga Dock Co.²²³ at its Uraga shipyard near Yokosuka for NYK²²¹; construction completed in Oct. 1934; requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Army in Sep. 1941 for use as a military transport; sunk on 11 Nov. 1942 by U.S. aircraft while involved in operations supplying forces on Guadalcanal.

7. Atsutasan-maru (熱田山丸)

Built for the Mitsui Steamship Co.²¹⁹ by Mitsui's shipbuilding division at its Tamano shipyard in Okayama prefecture; construction completed in Dec. 1937; requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Army in Jul. 1941 and fitted with anti-aircraft guns for use as an armed military transport; sunk

²¹⁹ Mitsui-sempaku KK (三井船舶株式会社)

²²⁰ Mitsubishi-jūkō KK (三菱重工株式会社)

²²¹ Nippon-yūsen KK (日本郵船株式会社)

²²² Harada-kisen KK (原田汽船株式会社)

²²³ Uraga-senkyo KK (浦賀船渠株式会社)

on 16 Dec. 1941 by U.S. submarine while approaching Sanya (三亚, known as San'ā in Japanese) port, Hainan Island, after its involvement in the landing operations at Songkhla.

8. Kashii-maru (香椎丸)

Built by Harima Shipbuilding Co.²²⁴ at its shipyard in Aioi, Hyogo prefecture, for the Kokusai Steamship Co.²²⁵, later merged with OSK²²⁶; construction completed in Jun. 1936; requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Army in Apr. 1941 for use as a military transport; sunk by U.S. aircraft on 10 Nov. 1944 while at anchor in Ormoc Bay, Leyte Island, Philippines.

9. Ryūjō-maru (龍城丸)

Officially named the Shinshū-maru (神州丸), was under the cover name of Ryūjō-maru at the time of its participation in the Songkhla landing operation; built by Harima Shipbuilding Co.²²⁴ at its shipyard in Aioi, Hyogo prefecture, for the Japanese Imperial Army as an amphibious assault ship for deploying landing craft; construction completed in Dec. 1934; attacked on 3 Jan. 1945 by U.S. aircraft while approaching the port of Kauhsiung (高雄, known as Takao in Japanese), Taiwan, and badly damaged; later sunk by U.S. submarine.

10. Kansai-maru (関西丸)

Built by the Yokohama Dock Co.²²⁷ for the Kishimoto Steamship Co.²²⁸ (later merged with Harada Steamship Co.); construction completed Dec. 1930; requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Army in Sep. 1941 for use as a military transport; attacked by U.S. submarine on 18 Sep. 1943 off Manus Island near Papua New Guinea; it sank the next day.

Other Ships

Miscellaneous ships

Naminoue-maru (波上丸 also 波ノ上丸)

Built by Mitsui's shipbuilding division at its Tamano shipyard in Okayama prefecture for OSK²²¹; built as a passenger-cargo ship, construction completed in Dec. 1936; chartered in Aug. 1937 by the Imperial Japanese Army and converted into a hospital ship; requisitioned by the IJA in Oct. 1941; converted to a military troop transport in Sep. 1942; sunk off the coast of New Ireland Island on 7 Oct. 1942 by U.S. submarine while en route to Guadalcanal.

Nojima-maru (野島丸) general-purpose naval transport

Built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries²²⁰ at its Nagasaki shipyard for NYK²²¹; requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Navy in July 1941 to use as a transport for naval soldiers; on 16 Sep. 1942 came under repeated attacks by U.S. aircraft and heavily damaged while anchored at Kiska Island, Alaska, where it had unloaded troops and supplies; attacked by aircraft again on 1 Oct.; towed by

²²⁴ Harima-zōsen KK (播磨造船株式会社)

²²⁵ Kokusai-kisen KK (国際汽船株式会社)

²²⁶ Ōsaka-shōsen KK (大阪商船株式会社)

²²⁷ Yokohama-senkyo KK (横浜船渠株式会社)

²²⁸ Kishimoto-kisen KK (岸本汽船株式会社)

companion ship and run aground to prevent sinking; on 13 Oct. abandoned by crew; bombed again on 20 Apr. 1943 and set afire leaving it a burned out hulk.

Military ships

Asagiri (朝霧) destroyer (provided immediate escort and protection for the ten-transport Songkhla convoy)

Built at the Sasebo Naval Arsenal in Nagasaki prefecture; commissioned in Jun. 1930; attacked by U.S. aircraft and sunk on 28 Aug 1942 off the east coast of Santa Isabel Island and north of Malaita Island in the Solomons during operations in the battle for Guadalcanal.

Amagiri (天霧) destroyer (provided immediate escort and protection for the ten-transport Songkhla convoy)

Built by Ishikawajima Shipbuilding Co.²²⁹ at its Tokyo shipyard; commissioned in Nov. 1930; struck a mine and sank on 23 Apr. 1944 while sailing up the Makassar Strait (between the islands of Borneo and Sulawesi) toward Davao on Mindanao Island, Philippines.

Yūgiri (夕霧) destroyer (provided general protection for the Songkhla, Pattani and Kota Bharu landings)

Built at the Maizuru Naval Arsenal in Maizuru, Kyoto prefecture; commissioned in Dec. 1930; sunk at sea (between Latangai Is., Papua New Guinea, and Buka Is., Solomon Island) on 26 Nov. 1943 while engaged in battle with U.S. naval ships (battle of Cape St. George).

Hatsutaka (初鷹) minelayer

Built by Harima Shipbuilding Co.²²⁴ at its Aioi shipyard in Hyogo prefecture; commissioned in Oct. 1939; sunk off the coast of Terengganu, Malaya (one kilometer northwest of Pulau Tenggol) on 16 May 1945 while engaged in battle with U.S. submarines.

Kamikawa-maru (神川丸) seaplane tender (provided reconnaissance for the Songkhla and Kota Bharu landings)

Built as a freighter for the Kawasaki Steamship Co.²³⁰ by Kawasaki Heavy Industries²³¹ at its Kobe shipyard; construction completed in Mar. 1937; requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Navy in Sep. 1937 and refitted as a seaplane tender; sunk by submarine attack in the early minutes of 29 May 1943 about 125 km NNW of Kavieng town on the northern tip of New Ireland Is., Papua New Guinea.

Sagara-maru (相良丸) seaplane tender (provided reconnaissance for the Songkhla and Kota Bharu landings)

Built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries²²⁰ at its Nagasaki shipyard for NYK²²¹; construction completed in Nov. 1940; requisitioned in Sep. 1941 by the Imperial Japanese Navy and refitted as seaplane tender; while en route from Kobe to Yokosuka with a cargo of raw cotton and sundry

²²⁹ Ishikawashima-zōsen KK (石川島造船株式会社)

²³⁰ Kawasaki-kisen KK (川崎汽船株式会社)

²³¹ Kawasaki-jūkō KK (川崎重工株式会社)

goods, torpedoed by U.S. submarine on 23 Jun. 1943 off Omaezaki, Shizuoka prefecture, leaving it badly damaged and adrift; taken in tow by other vessels, but beached on 24 Jun. 1943 near the Tenryu River estuary; torpedoed again on 4 Jul. 1943 and left a derelict hulk.

Minesweeper No. 1 (Dai-ichi-gō sōkaitei [第一号掃海艇])

Built for the Imperial Japanese Navy by Harima Shipbuilding Co.²²⁴ at its Kobe shipyard; commissioned in Jun. 1930; attacked by U.S. aircraft and sunk on 10 Aug. 1945 while in Yamada Bay, Iwate prefecture.

Minesweeper No. 4 (Dai-yon-gō sōkaitei [第四号掃海艇])

Built for the Imperial Japanese Navy at the Sasebo Naval Arsenal shipyard in Nagasaki prefecture; commissioned in Apr. 1925; was anchored in the port of Singapore on 15 Aug. 1945 when the Pacific war ended; was scuttled off Singapore in Jul. 1946 by the British navy.

Minesweeper No. 5 (Dai-go-gō sōkaitei [第五号掃海艇])

Built for the Imperial Japanese Navy by Mitsui's shipbuilding division at its Tamano shipyard in Okayama prefecture; commissioned in Feb. 1929; torpedoed and sunk by British submarine on 4 Nov. 1944 in the Malacca Strait.

Minesweeper No. 6 (Dai-roku-gō sōkaitei [第六号掃海艇])

Built for the Imperial Japanese Navy by Osaka Iron Works²³² at its Sakurajima (Osaka) shipyard; commissioned in Feb. 1929; attacked and sunk by Dutch aircraft on 26 Dec. 1941 off the coast of Kuching, Sarawak, while supporting operations for the invasion of Borneo.

Eikō-maru (永興丸) minesweeper tender

Built by Osaka Iron Works²³² at its Innoshima shipyard in Hiroshima prefecture for OSK²²⁶; construction completed in Jan. 1938; requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Navy in Sep. 1941 and refitted as a minesweeper tender; sunk by British submarine on 18 Jun. 1944 at the northern end of the Malacca Strait.

Submarine Chaser No. 8 (Dai-hachi-gō kusentei [第八号駆潜艇])

Built for the Imperial Japanese Navy by Mitsui's shipbuilding division at its Tamano shipyard in Okayama prefecture; commissioned in Nov. 1938; came under attack by two British submarines and sunk on 4 Mar. 1945 about six kilometers south of Pulau Pangkor off the coast of Perak, Malaya.

Submarine Chaser No. 9 (Dai-kyū-gō kusentei [第九号駆潜艇])

Built for the Imperial Japanese Navy by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries²²⁰ at its Yokohama shipyard; commissioned in May 1939; anchored at the port of Kure, Hiroshima prefecture, on 15 Aug. 1945 when Pacific war ended.

²³² Ōsaka-kōkō KK (大阪鐵工株式会社)

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