

THE JAPANESE CONSULATE IN SONGKHLA, 1941*

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The morning was clear and pleasantly warm. A large 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 Japanese consulate in Songkhla. There were about 30 Japanese present, most of whom were living in southern Thailand. Among them were Dr. Seto Hisao and his wife who ran a clinic in Songkhla. Three officials from the Japanese legation in Bangkok were also present. One was Asada Shunsuke, the consul-general and highest ranking Japanese at the ceremony. With him were Amada Rokurō, Asada's deputy, and Nishino Junjiro, a young foreign service officer who had been in Bangkok for three years as a Thai language student before joining the legation in 1940. Amada, a long-time resident of Thailand with a good command of the country's history, culture and language, acted as interpreter for the ceremony.

*บทความนี้ บรรณาธิการได้เชิญให้เขียนขึ้นเพื่อลงตีพิมพ์ในวารสารธรรมศาสตร์ ฉบับพิเศษญี่ปุ่น โดยที่ได้พิจารณาว่าผู้เขียน Dr. William L. Swan เป็นผู้เชี่ยวชาญเรื่องความสัมพันธ์ไทย - ญี่ปุ่นในช่วงสงครามโลกครั้งที่สอง ได้เขียนวิทยานิพนธ์ปริญญาเอกเสนอที่มหาวิทยาลัยแห่งชาติออสเตรเลีย เรื่อง Japanese Economic Relations with Siam : Aspects of their Historical Development 1884 to 1942 (ANU 1986) โดย Dr. Swan ได้เขียนบทความนี้ในลักษณะเป็นการพรรณนาภาพเหตุการณ์ต่าง ๆ ในลักษณะเป็น story ไม่มีเชิงอรรถใด ๆ ส่วนแหล่งข้อมูลนั้นได้ชี้แจงไว้ท้ายบทความ - บรรณาธิการประจำฉบับ

Leading the ceremony was the new consul for Songkhla, Katsuno Toshio, a heavy-set, self-confident man who had a tendency to boast. Born in 1891 in Okayama prefecture, he passed the third-level administrative (what the Japanese Foreign Ministry called the chancellor or shokisei) examination for the foreign service in 1922. Prior to this, however, Katsuno's life had taken a course quite different from that which usually led to a job in the Japanese government, and which gave clear indication of the bold, self-confident character that would affect his later foreign service career. In 1913, before completing his studies at the private Kansei University in Osaka, he left school and made his way down to Australia where he lived for two years. After returning to Japan, he worked the next six years for a Mr. Dixon, a Sydney brush merchant and exporter working in Osaka. Katsuno was 31 years old when he passed the foreign service examination.

Shortly after entering the foreign service in the spring of 1922, Katsuno was sent to work at the Japanese consulate in Chifeng in southern Manchuria. He remained in Manchuria for the next five years, moving to Harbin in 1923 and then Liaoyang in 1925. During 1927 and the first half of 1928

he was back working at the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo; then from mid 1928 until the end of 1929, he was sent to Colombo, Ceylon. For the first four months of 1930 he was back in Tokyo. Then in May he was sent to Jinan, a city about 370 kilometers south of Beijing. The situation had changed greatly in China since Katsuno had left in 1926. Two years earlier, in May 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 very much 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*" the following year further antagonized China. During the ensuing years the Japanese army encroached deeper into northern China. Through these years of tension, Katsuno, though only an administrator in the consulate, evidently displayed ability and courage, for he was one of those honored in 1934 for meritorious work performed in 1931 and 1934, two years marked by exceptionally heavy fighting between Japan and China. For his work he was awarded 85 yen.

Katsuno was now 43 years old, and the abilities he had

demonstrated, and which had brought him special recognition, soon further advanced his career. In the spring of 1936 he was sent to Dunhua in east-central Manchuria where there was a branch office of the consulate-general at Jilin city. In August of that year he was put in charge of that branch office. Later that same year he was sent out to head the consulate branch in Suiyuan, an area in Inner Mongolia north of Shaanxi province. In July 1938 he was raised in rank to vice-consul and transferred to the town of Houhe. That same year he was also decorated for distinguished and meritorious service with the honor of Ju-Nana-I bestowed upon him. Finally in the spring of 1939 he returned to Jinan to head the consulate there, and where he remained until early 1941.

During his many years in north China, Katsuno had become an excellent speaker of Mandarin Chinese. He had also become quite a drinker, and at times after having drunk a good deal at one of the local restaurants, 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. He had also had problems and strained relations with military people in areas where he had

been posted. Some assignments took him close to the front. This was particularly true when Katsuno was in Suiyuan. He saw the army in action and he knew it was his critical reporting about the army's activities that caused him problems with the local military people. The growing influence of the military in the political and foreign affairs of China and Japan added to the friction. The military grew more arrogant, making them less hesitant to interfere in areas belonging to the Foreign Ministry and Katsuno's jurisdiction. Years later he recalled how the soldiers in China often swaggered about, contemptuous of civilians.

"I wasn't afraid of them though," Katsuno asserted. "I could handle them. I was bigger than many 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 swaggarts to a duel. On several occasions I threatened to kill some who dared challenge me." Katsuno went on to explain, *"You see, the army in China came to think that the ambassadors and consuls were there to be ordered about and to do the army's bidding. No military officer ever ordered me to do anything. If anything, I ordered*

them about. 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 there was truth in it too. Katsuno was indeed good at kendo, 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 making him much heavier than most Japanese of the time. His physical advantage, along with his self-confident, bold demeanor and his known skill at kendo made his threats a good deal more than idle.

As everyone at the Songkhla consulate ceremony stood in silence, Katsuno walked over to the flag pole that stood in the center of the circular driveway in front of the consulate. He slowly raised the raising-sun flag as all the Japanese present began to entone "Kimi-gayo", the national anthem. It was a spine-tingling moment for them. The flag of their homeland unfurled against the clear sky of southern Thailand. Behind them, brightly shining on the front of the new consulate, was the golden emblem of the imperial chrysanthemum. A feeling of pride pervaded

the group. Now Japan too had a presence in the south, rivaling that of Britain, the only other nation with a consulate in 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.

The establishment of a consulate in Songkhla was an important step for the Japanese military in planning the attack on Singapore. The consulate was to be used as a center for gathering intelligence about conditions on the Malay peninsula which would help guide preparations for the campaign. The first step in these preparations had been taken back in October and November 1940 when the battle-proven 5th Division in southern China was moved via Tongking to the Shanghai area where it spent the next 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 the Imperial Guard divisions made up the main force of the 25th Army which was given the task of capturing Singapore.

With military preparations under way, the need to collect as much intelligence as possible about the Malay peninsula became urgent, and as part of this intelligence effort, the military sought out the assistance of

the foreign Ministry to open a consulate in Songkhla. This 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 long had a consular office in Songkhla, and Japan now, on the basis of its treaty agreements with Thailand, requested and was granted permission to establish a consulate in Songkhla as well. The Japanese military now pressed anxiously for the Foreign Ministry 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 on official business from Jinan where he was posted as consul. He was at the Foreign Ministry office one day shortly past mid month when he ran into his bureau chief.

"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 enquired.

"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?"*

"In south Thailand, on the Malay peninsula, not far from old Ligor of Yamada Nagamasa fame. You'll be a Nagamasa of the Showa era. 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 over 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 the chief spoke he 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 nice.

"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 had to wonder.

"No, we don't. You're going to be the first. We want you to have it open by April. We're really in a hurry."

Gauging from the chief's words and where he pointed on the map, Katsuno did not pursue anymore 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 spoke softly, *"Two soldiers will be coming down later."*

Katsuno had to wait a week before he could get a plane leaving Japan. While waiting he dropped in one day on his friend Ushijima Keijiro, at the time a major-general in the reserves. They had known each other since Katsuno's days in Dunhua 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 fighting and bombing in China and could see himself caught again in the midst of warfare. Ushijima broke in saying that the Foreign Ministry had probably given the assignment 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 act pretty arrogantly. They'll get into fights and everything, and the-

re 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 it was you after all that they pointed at to do the job."

Katsuno listened. The bureau chief too had said there was no one else more suitable. Perhaps he was the one meant for the job.

Katsuno's family was living in Lüshun (Port Arthur) in Manchuria. 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, he took a room at the Oriental Hotel, then immediately headed over to the legation. There he was met by a very surprised Minister Futami, head of the legation in Bangkok. No one had been expecting him. 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 important though, Asada wanted him to move in with Amada who could prepare him for Thailand and his Songkhla assignment. Amada piled the new consul with books on Thailand which the latter 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 feelings that he was told pervaded the Chinese in the far south. 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. Out of this concentrated effort, in hardly more than a week, Katsuno had gotten a grasp on 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 almost 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. He can help you. You can discuss everything with him. And one more thing. You are to contact me directly on all matters."

Katsuno understood. In the short time there 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 in the interval, until posting of the new ambassador, the consul-general had taken charge of matters. 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 Haadyai, and from there one of the local Japanese drove him to Songkhla. He took a room at the Songkhla Railroad Hotel, then went to have a look at the building which was to serve as the consulate. It was along a quiet road towards the beach some distance north of the main part of town. A little further to the north, beyond a thickly forested hill inhabited by countless monkeys, lay the British consulate. The building itself was suitably large, two stories high, built of wood, with large verandas on the first

and second floors. Next door was a girls' teacher training school. Though large, the building was not impressive. It apparently had been a hotel of some sort, but to Katsuno it must have been one of questionable reputation. Walking through it he 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 compound, while spacious, had been badly neglected. Katsuno could not help but feel disappointed. As it stood, the building was absolutely unfit to be the 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 given, and there were a mere two weeks before it had to be opened.

Katsuno returned to his hotel room. So much had to be done in so little time, but he knew nothing about Songkhla or where to get anything done. Mulling over what to do, his thoughts hit upon Dr. Seto and what Asada had said. *"He can help you. You can discuss everything with him."* Yes, thought Katsuno; it was time to look up Dr. Seto.

Dr. Seto Hisao, born in the early 1890's 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 of the Meiji and Taisho periods (in 1912). He lived there and in Malaya for about the next decade, probably doing various kinds of work, but eventually becoming involved in selling medicines as an itinerant salesman “*doctor*”, and later it seems he also found work as an assistant to a British (or British-trained) doctor at one of the large British-owned rubber plantations (at least this is what a Japanese, acquainted with Seto in Songkhla just before the war, had heard said about the doctor’s medical training). Around 1925 Seto moved to Thailand taking up residence in Phuket on the peninsula’s west coast. It was most likely at this time that he “*qualified*” as a doctor, his medical experience as an assistant to a British doctor and a suitable “*fee*” to the local Thai authorities being enough qualification for a license. In Phuket Seto married and settled down with a Japanese woman. In 1931 they had a son, Masao. Around 1935 the family moved to Songkhla, the largest town in the far south, where Seto rented a sizeable two-story brick and stucco building across from Donrak Temple (วัดดอนรัก) at the northern end of town. The family home occupied the

second floor while on the first Seto opened a medical office which he called the “*Recover-Life*” clinic, the two Chinese characters 回生 painted on the sign out front. The local Chinese and Thais pronounced it “*kai-che*” (Thai : ไก่เช), and that was the name that Seto and his family came to be known by in the local community. He was soon being called Mo Kaiche (Dr. Kaiche). He earned a reputation as a kind, generous person who would not demand payment from patients too poor to pay, and he often received goods as payment for his services.

There was perhaps only one other Japanese family in Songkhla when the Setos moved in. This was the family of Dr. Hisamatsu Tanoshi, a dentist. He and his wife 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 both he and his wife died before the Second World War broke out.

Some time 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. He 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. It would seem therefore that the event took place around April. There was a Japanese man visiting his father. It was a morning; the two were going to go fishing, and Seto told his son to come on along. They rented a boat, and normally a Thai fisherman would have been expected to handle it, but Seto took the helm himself, steering the boat out onto the lake and among the islands that lay about five kilometers off the harbor of Songkhla. The three of them stayed out the entire day, but they did not fish. The fishing lines on the poles the two men used were marked off for measuring the depth of the lake, and they spent the day moving among the islands checking the water depth. They did have one other pole that trailed 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 likely to think something irregular was happening if a child were along. Masao never went on a fishing trip again, but there were others in town who saw Seto go out on other

occasions to “fish” on the lake. One such person was Su-chat Ratanaprakan, a prominent member of the town and owner of the largest rice mill in the area. The mill was located along the docks with a full view of the lake.

In time the Seto home began 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 often than not a military officer was hidden behind the civilian exterior. By 1941 Dr. Seto had become the military’s important contact and means for gathering information in the Songkhla area. It was this Dr. Seto that Katsuno, the consul without a consulate, now sought out.

With Seto’s assistance there was soon a large crew of carpenters, painters and laborers assembled. Katsuno had them divided into shifts which set to work around the clock renovating the consulate. 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 a Japanese consulate.

As work went on Katsuno began looking around the town of Songkhla. Being able to speak the language, he immediately began making contacts with local Chinese, enlisting some to help with the work of setting up the consulate and making arrangements for the grand celebration he planned to mark the opening of the consulate. The main part of town was concentrated along four or five streets that paralleled the harbor front. The area where the consulate building stood was largely covered in trees and bushes with a couple of roads cutting through out to the coast. Thatched and wooden houses, most of them built on stilts, were clustered here and there among the trees. Katsuno hardly regarded it as a town at all, especially when he compared it with the brick and mortar cities he had known in China. Songkhla’s sparseness caused a worry that stuck in the back of his mind. There might not be enough food and drink in the town for the kind of celebration he intended to have on April 1st.

Another point that struck him was the lack of animosity towards him, unlike what the legating people had told him to expect. 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 Charoensin, was the brother of the provincial education officer. And Katsuno soon found a caretaker to look after the consulate building and grounds. He could do his shopping and walk freely about the town. He encountered no difficulties at all. However, he realized that the main concentration of Chinese was not in Songkhla but about thirty kilometers inland at the town of Haadyai. 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 two earlier the company had tried to open an office in Haadyai, but no one would rent them a building. They finally had to settle for an old dilapidated building on the outskirts of town. Wondering just how strong the supposed anti-Japanese feeling was in Haadyai, Katsuno decided to try a little test. He would send invitations for his upcoming celebration to the important Chinese merchants in Haadyai. With a little checking he settled on 35 and invited them to come. He wanted to see how many would accept.

After the ceremony at the new consulate, Katsuno's

grand celebration took place at a public pavilion out at the beach. It was a huge gathering, some 300 people in all. Mr. Oldham, 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 Haadyai. The 35th was out of town on the day, but Katsuno delighted in telling the story how a few days later, after that merchant had returned, he came personally to the consulate to apologize for his absence. Such experiences convinced him that the fear and worry in the legation about anti-Japanese feeling in the south was unfounded. Since his arrival in Songkhla he had run into no obstructions, not even from the merchants in Haadyai, a supposed Chinese den of anti-Japanese sentiment.

"There's no anti-Japanese feeling down here that we need to worry about," Katsuno concluded with his typical self-confidence, and one job he set about doing was encouraging Mitsui to get a better office. He told Hayashi, the Mitsui representative in Haadyai, to go ahead and look for a better place, declaring, *"I've gotten all kinds of cooperation from the Chinese down here. There's nothing to worry about."*—Years later, while reminiscing, Katsuno speculated that perhaps the so-called anti-Japanese feel-

ing in Haadyai had been a fabrication of the local Taiwanese merchants. These Taiwanese were Japanese citizens and 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 southern Thailand. But by the late 1930's, Japan's need for raw materials had grown enormously. Because of this, Mitsui decided to open its own office in Haadyai to buy up more quickly and efficiently the quantities of goods needed. Katsuno surmized that not being able to speak the local languages, Mitsui naturally turned to the local Taiwanese who could speak Japanese. The Taiwanese, however, not wanting to jeopardize their own interests, told Mitsui that the local Chinese business community was anti-Japanese and would not do business. Being unable to do otherwise, Mitsui was forced to continue relying on the Taiwanese middlemen.

This of course was Katsuno's later reflection. At the time he turned his attention to cultivating relations with the important Chinese in Haadyai, visiting them and inviting them over to the consulate. He made an immediate impression with his Chinese songs which he would sing while eating and drinking at one of the local

Haadyai restaurants. Excursions into Haadyai with other members of the consulate staff (who came down later) became a regular pastime. After plenty of food and drink, Katsuno would be feeling good and he would begin a song. It was not unusual for him to go over to the window and sing out into the evening. Below 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.

While it was part of the consul's duties to help improve relations between resident Japanese and the local community, and help Japanese businesses operating in his jurisdiction, such duties were not the primary objective of the consulate in Songkhla. It had been established 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 close to Katsuno's own age. He was a longtime resident in Thailand and former teacher at the Japanese school in Bangkok. He had been hired locally by the legation. The other arrival was Billy Tobina, the son of a Thai mother and American father. He was in his mid thirties, had lived his entire life in Thailand, and had been hired

by Amada to work at the legation. He spoke Thai and English, but no Japanese.

Following the arrival of these two staff members, Katsuno set out on a tour of inspection of the region now under his jurisdiction. (Officially Katsuno did not become consul at Songkhla until 24 June 1941, the date of his imperial letter of assignment. 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.) This region 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 from Thailand into Malaya. He headed down for Pattani where the Nankon Company (南昆公司) 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 son in the family had been born down there and could speak the local Pattani-Malaya dialect. From Pattani Katsuno headed further down the coast to Narathiwat where lived a doctor named Shiba Giichi. Like Seto,

Dr. Shiba had left Japan years earlier to find opportunities in the Southern Seas, living first in Singapore and Malaya before eventually moving to Thailand where one could purchase a medical practice. Shiba had kept in touch with Japanese living in Malaya, and he had information about conditions south of the border.

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 Thailand. This passed through Yala and the village of Betong. 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 Haadyai 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 simply spend his time traveling 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 Haadyai, 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 people who most often visited the consulate were naturally the local Japanese. Seto was one of Katsuno's frequent visitors. The doctor and the consul got together almost every day, often times at the Seto residence. In this manner the next several months passed until July when two more people finally joined the consulate staff.

One of the new arrivals was Nishimaki Toraō, a young administrator who had entered the foreign service in the spring of 1940 after passing the third-level (administrative) examination. The Songkhla assignment was his first posting overseas. With Nishimaki was Major Ōzone Yoshihiko, who however was going by the name of Mr. Gotō Saburō. Both of these men took up posts as administrators in the consulate, but only Nishimaki handled consular work. Ōzone, alias Goto, was responsible for gathering intelligence which he sent back to Southern Army headquarters in Saigon. Although an army major, Ōzone was a mildmannered, slightly fat man with



round-rimmed glasses and hair parted down the center. He played his civilian role well, easily fooling uninformed military officers who visited Songkhla.

Not long afterwards another member joined the staff. This was Major Kuboki, and Army Aircorps pilot who arrived as clerk named Ishii Tarō but who, like Ōzone, was an intelligence officer. Unlike Ōzone, however, Kuboki was a thin, solid man, tense and quick-tempered who, like so many of his type, tended to let his true occupation show through his civilian disguise. Around this same time Iwasaki Yōji also became part of the staff. He was a graduate of Ōkawa Juku, a school organized in 1938 by Professor Ōkawa Shūmei and which had connections with and funding from Mantetsu (the South Manchuria Railroad Company) and the Army 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 went into the foreign service. Iwasaki had taken up Thai studies, and in 1940, following graduation, he was sent to Bangkok and Chulalongkorn University for further language study. At the consulate he impressed everyone with his splendid voice and his ability to sing popular Thai songs. He was a particular hit with the students at the girls' teacher training school next door, and Katsuno recalled how Iwasaki's singing could interfere with studies as students turned their ears and eyes towards the consulate and Iwasaki's songs and away from the lectures they were having. Soon after Iwasaki, another Ōkawa Juku graduate arrived. This was Itō Keisuke who had studied the East Indies and Malay language. He had taken a particular interest in that Southeast Asian civilization and

had entered Ōkawa Juku in the hopes of ultimately going to Java. Itō graduated in the spring of 1941, was hired by the foreign service, and in August 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 there. He had one memorable experience, which he recalled with some humor. On arriving in Bangkok Itō had taken a room at the Thailand Hotel which, to a young man who had spent nearly his entire life in Japan's northeast and was on his first venture abroad, had the finest facilities one could imagine. But it was also quite beyond his means, and in a matter of days he had practically no money left. 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 his knowledge of Malay could be of some use.

By the end of August 1941, five months after the consulate had opened, there were seven Japanese on the staff; only two,

Katsuno and Nishimaki, were regular foreign service officers. In addition there were the periodic visitors, usually civilian dressed military, who came down to reconnoiter, as well as the local Japanese who regularly dropped in at the consulate. The coming and going of numerous people at the consulate gave the local Thais the impression of a staff rather larger than really existed. And when compared with a single Englishman, Mr. Oldham, at the British consulate, the Japanese office could only be viewed locally as very much overstaffed.

Intelligence work at the consulate was carried on largely by the consul, Katsuno, and the two officers, Ōzone (alias Gōtō) and Kuboki (alias Ishii). But the three did not coordinate their efforts very much. Katsuno was under Asada in Bangkok while Ōzone and Kuboki were responsible to offices in Saigon. Though there was some mutual assisting and comparing notes, a natural result of working in the same office together, 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 rather disparaging of the work done by the two majors.

"Ōzone and Kuboki could speak no foreign language; 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."

Itō described a trip he took once 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"*

Efforts to employ Itō's Malay also fell short. Unlike Iwasaki who had a year's extra

language training in Thailand, Itō had never used his Malay outside of school. Worse still, the local Malay dialect was totally unlike anything he had studied. Early in his stay at the consulate, Katsuno told Itō to go to Haadyai and try out his Malay. *"I couldn't understand anything they said"*, he recalled. *"I reported this quite frankly to Mr. Katsuno, and after that he pretty well gave up expecting anything from my Malay language,"* Itō reminisced with a chuckle.

While discrediting the work of his two colleagues, Katsuno quite egotistically rated his information as the only worth-while intelligence gathered by the consulate. His primary sources of information were the several Chinese with whom he had developed a rapport. In Katsuno's view the Chinese were the only source of really substantial intelligence available to the consulate. They could move around the country freely without attracting suspicion. They had contacts with their people in Malaya and could move back and forth over the border with no difficulties. Katsuno cited one case. One of his Chinese contacts had been down to 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 and Alor

Star. Probing his man for more information, Katsuno said he was able to estimate the size of the force. No source available to the others in the consulate could have discovered such information he asserted (although Katsuno never realized that the British in Malaya never had tanks, and what his informant probably had seen were tracked Bren gun carriers that the British tried out with poor results in Malaya). But 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 largely the money he paid and the prospects of future business with the Japanese that made possible much of the information that he got from the Chinese. 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 Katsuno happened to have known in Jinan and who on Katsuno's request had gone down to reconnoiter around Kota Baharu, returned to Songkhla and came to 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 Baharu area from the information provided by Katsuno's 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 legation had been raised to embassy status in late August), showed it to Col. Tamura 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 give the consul 6000 baht for the map. With this money Katsuno could get going again with his espionage work.

In early October a new member joined the consulate, a captain named Inobe. A graduate of Nakano Gakkō, the recently opened Army espionage training center in Tokyo, Inobe, unlike the two earlier officers, went by his own name. In the middle of that same October, a provincial tennis tournament, sponsored by Mitsui, took place in Songkhla. Yasuda Eiichi, head of Mitsui Sempaku's (Mitsui Steamship Company) Bangkok office, and known in the city'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, was lying off Songkhla to take on cargo. A young man who identified himself as from the consulate approached Yasuda one day to ask if he could help the consul, Katsuno, make a chart of the waters off Songkhla. The consul wanted to use the Akibasan Maru for the purpose. Yasuda knew Katsuno well; the two were on very friendly terms, so he agreed to help. Unknown to Yasuda, the young man he spoke with was Capt. Inobe.

Accompanied by Mr. Gōtō (Maj. Ōzone), Katsuno boarded the Akibasan Maru and had the captain take them out into the vicinity of Cat and Mouse islands, two small islands that lay a short distance off the coast of Songkhla. With the help of crew members, Katsuno and Ōzone took measurements of the water depth and checked their readings with those shown on an oceanographic chart they had. Katsuno then had Ōzone and himself taken to Mouse Island, the one lying closer to shore, where the major made a sketch of the bay and coastline. After returning to the consulate, the two men spent the night putting together a sketch map of Songkhla's coastline and coastal waters, giving

depths and distances. Ōzone had the map taken up to Bangkok and sent on to Saigon. Recalling the episode, Katsuno was sure the map had been used in preparing the landing at Songkhla. 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.

With October the monsoon began to change bringing a rougher surf along the peninsula's east coast. The international climate had also 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, Major Fujiwara Iwaichi, who had set up the F-Kikan to propagandize and organize anti-British activity among the Asian populations in Malaya, came to Songkhla. He was in civilian dress and carried diplomatic papers identifying him as Mr. Yamashita. The F-Kikan had placed a number of its agents in Japanese companies working in Haadyai, Pattani and other towns in the far south. Fujiwara had come down to have a personal look at 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 precau-

tion of leaving his passport and other sensitive documents in the safe at the consulate. It was a wise decision because later that day while having drinks with Katsuno, his room at the Songkhla Railway 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 Maj. Fujiwara. All the Japanese at the consulate joined, drinking heavily, especially Katsuno and Fujiwara. Although having arrived "*incognito*", it was no secret among the consulate staff who Mr. Yamashita was or what business he was doing in Thailand. One member of the staff, Itō Keisuke, the unsuccessful Malay interpreter, was particularly interested in the work the F-Kikan was carrying out. He wanted to go south also to be among the Malay people, and during the party he told Maj. Fujiwara that he desired very much to join the major's organization. Fujiwara agreed. 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.

With November the monsoon winds blew strongly over Songkhla and the rains began arriving. International tension continued to rise. Outside the consulate police and even military patrols began appearing. 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, precautions increased.

On November 26th a telegram arrived from Ambassador Tubokami telling Katsuno to come up to Bangkok immediately. The next morning he caught the train at Haadyai and arrived at the embassy the following morning, November 28th. There he was informed that Asada, who not long before had been called back to Tokyo for consultation, was expected to return shortly with a secret and most important message. A plane which 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 developing, and Gotō's message asked the consul to return to Songkhla. Was something developing in Songkhla? 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 Hotel luxurious and in beautiful surroundings which helped him pass a pleasant night. The

next day, December 1st, he caught a 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 Phetchaburi Road (now the Indonesian embassy). Asada was there with the ambassador having arrived in Bangkok earlier that same day. Katsuno now heard for the first time that Japan was intent upon war and that just before Japanese forces began landing, the ambassador would begin negotiations with the Thai government to obtain free passage for Japanese troops and prevent the outbreak of fighting between the two countries. This had been in the message Asada had brought back from Tokyo, but it gave no definite date when Japan intended to commence war. However while in Tokyo Asada had gotten word that it would be on the 5th or 8th of December. (Reminiscing years later, Katsuno recalled three dates being mentioned: the 5th, the 8th or the 15th; but in a memoir written in 1954, much earlier than Katsuno's, Asada indicated that he mentioned only two dates.) There was some talk of getting the Japanese civilians in Songkhla out of town along with the non-military staff at the consulate, but Katsuno rejected such ideas. There was

no place down there for them to flee to, he told them. And Japanese were not only in Songkhla; they were scattered all over the south. Besides, such an evacuation effort undertaken in the sparsely populated south 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 the south as was undertaken in Bangkok on the eve of the war.

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

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

"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 radio. Wouldn't Ozone and Kuboki be delighted too, Katsuno thought.

"It's for communicating

with the invasion fleet as it approaches Songkhla," Tamura informed him. "Please tell Major Ozone."

"What's in the other trunks?"

"One has a machinegun, and the other ammunition and handgrenades."

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 the Japanese army arrived they might have to protect themselves. — Katsuno understood. He would take the three trunk along. Things were developing just as he had imagined back in February when he sat talking with his friend Ushijima. The bullets were about to start flying.

A radio operator had been dispatched from Saigon with the radio. He would go with Katsuno. He took the trunk containing the radio while two young men, Okawa Juku graduates who were working at the embassy, helped carry the other two trunks to the train station.

Around three o'clock on the afternoon of December 3rd, the train pulled into Haadyai Station. Ozone 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 watching the passing windows, and slightly fat Ozone looking down at the platform and tapping it with the toe of his shoe. With their assistance, Katsuno got the three trunks off the train. The two of course were curious to know what they were. Katsuno said to take them to the car. He knew he had to inform the two majors as quickly as possible of the critical situation. The drive to Songkhla would take time. He decided to go over to the Mitsui office. They could talk there. The consulate driver, Mon, remembered years later his curiosity as he saw those three trunks brought out of the station and put into the trunk of the car. From the way they were being carried they were obviously filled with something heavy.

Katsuno along with Ozone, Kuboki and the radio operator got into the car, and the consul told Mon to drive them over to the Mitsui office. This was an impressive building on a spacious piece of land which Mitsui had purchased the previous spring from a German expatriot who had decided to sell his property and leave Thailand. The German, named Schreiber, had asked Katsuno if there were any Japanese company interested in buying. Katsuno had immediately urged Mitsui to take up Schreiber's

offer. At the office Katsuno took the three men to a separate room, told them what were in the trunks and what he had heard from Asada at the ambassador's residence. On hearing there was a radio 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 was about to be fulfilled. But time was incredibly short. The army could be landing in as little as two days.

The four rode back to the consulate, and with the help of others there carried the trunks into an inner room. Everyone was eager to see the radio, and it was removed from its trunk straightaway. But it was not long before the smiles of glee began to fade. There was no battery inside. The other trunks were opened and emptied, but there was no battery. Faces were now turning to frowns of consternation. There was no battery. How could Saigon have forgotten to put in a battery, and at a time like this no less. It seemed unbelievable. Kuboki, with his rather short temper, was furious. Ozone looked at the radio operator.

"You didn't pack this up, 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 on the floor, Ozone moaned, “How can you win a war when you do something like this.” 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 the war broke out. They tried flashlight batteries, tried connecting up a car battery; but the radio required a special military battery. In the end everything they tried was unsuccessful. The radio could not be used. They would not be able to communicate with the approaching fleet. They would not know which day 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 said to him. “We all thank you for your help, but it would be better for you to get on back to Saigon.”

That evening tension was high and the consulate staff began all-night vigils that would last until the invasion came. The next day would be the 4th; in hardly more than 24 hours, the Japanese army could be landing. Maj. Ōzone at some previous date had already been instructed to have vehicles as-

sembled at the beach when the army started landing. They were to be used by a special spearhead unit (*tokubetsu tosshintai* 特別突進隊) that was to move out as rapidly as possible towards 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 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 Ōzone himself organize the assembly of most of the town’s vehicles on the beach in the middle of the night. It was an incredible task, almost ridiculous in retrospect, but one that higher command, in Saigon or in Tokyo, had told him to do. With the invasion imminent, Ōzone searched for a way to carry out his instructions. The consulate was now under constant Thai surveillance. The staff had little doubt that their movements were watched by plain-clothes detectives. The only possible way Ōzone could see of doing the job was to contact some of the local Japanese, tell them to organize others to be ready to

get cars to take to the beach. Ōzone also contemplated lighting a signal fire at the top of Khao Tangkuan (เขาดังกวาน), one of the two forested hills not far from the consulate. It was possible that this had also been contained in his instructions along with getting vehicles. Sitting together in their office, Ōzone mentioned to Nishimaki his idea of asking some of the local Japanese to help. *'I'm going to talk with some of them and have them do it. What do you think?'* Nishimaki did not recommend that the major go through with it. Perhaps they might succeed in borrowing a few here and there, but they could never get the large number of vehicles that the army expected. Itō too remembered the car scheme. *"Ōzone 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 really a difficult task. First off, you needed money to get those vehicles. But when you think about it, 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. Besides, Songkhla just didn't have that many vehicles to take. In the end nothing was done."* The idea of lighting a signal fire was likewise abandoned.

On the 4th a telegram

arrived from the embassy. It informed Katsuno that the new Japanese consul-general to Singapore, Okamoto Suemasa, was departing Bangkok by train for Singapore and would be passing through Haadyai tomorrow afternoon, the 5th. Katsuno read the telegram. Would they be sending the new consul-general down this way if there was to be an invasion on the 5th?

December 5th came with no outbreak of war. Later that day Tsukamoto Masao, a young Foreign Ministry language student studying Thai in Bangkok, arrived at the consulate. He had accompanied the consul-general, Okamoto, from Bangkok as far as Haadyai and served as his interpreter. At Haadyai the consul-general had continued on to Malaya and Singapore while Tsukamoto caught a train going to Songkhla. On leaving Bangkok, this young student had been handed an envelope and simply told that it was a very important document which had to be given directly to Mr. Katsuno, the consul in Songkhla. Not knowing what was inside but realizing the extreme importance of the document, Tsukamoto put the envelope down inside his shirt under his belt and left it there until he reached Songkhla. On arriving at the consulate he handed the envelope over to Katsuno. The consul took it to

his office, opened it, and took out a new code book.

Although Tsukamoto wanted to remain down in Songkhla, Katsuno refused, ordering him back to Bangkok. He did not tell this young man anything about the pending invasion, but from the atmosphere around the consulate, Tsukamoto probably sensed that something was imminent. He took a room at the Songkhla Railroad Hotel. That evening a severe rain storm lashed down on the town.

December 6th came. Tsukamoto headed back to Haadyai and caught the train for Bangkok. That evening Katsuno was to give a party for the Thai High Commissioner of the South and for the commander of the Thai forces on the peninsula, Major General Senanarong, who was visiting from his headquarters in Nakhon Si Thammarat. The party was to be held at the Government Officials Club (*Samōsōn Khārāchakān*), and Katsuno had invited all the ranking government officials and military officers in Songkhla, Mr. Oldham, the British consul, as well as a number of local Japanese living in the south. One person present was Nai Plaek Silapakamphiset, the provincial education officer. He remembered that party. There were probably more than a hundred people there. Katsuno gave a speech; it was in

English, Nai Plaek recalled, telling the gathering how Thailand had long been a great nation and mentioning the Thai abstention at the League of Nations in 1933 when that body condemned Japan's actions in Manchuria. At this point Nai Plaek said that the consul turned to General Senanarong 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 Nai Plaek remembered the consul remarking jokingly, *"If the general could remain in Songkhla another day or two, there will be a lot more Japanese coming to join the party."*

Katsuno too remembered that party, although he never mentioned making such a remark which, if true, would have been the result of the volumes of alcohol he had consumed on the occasion. 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's whiskey produced in Australia,' he answered. 'What is it made from?' I asked. 'From corn,' he replied. Well, I had some white whiskey; I ate some food. But there wasn't much taste really. However, I had to eat. I had to enjoy. Otherwise people

might have perceived that something was afoot. But somehow the food was like sand in my mouth, the alcohol like medicine. I joked and made small talk with Mr. Oldham. But my mind was on something else. Kuboki and Inobe were at that very moment heading down for the Thai-Malay border to watch for the British army, in case it crossed into Thailand. There was a possibility that the British might try to move forward, make a preemptive attack. We knew that could happen. Well, I was worrying about my major and captain down near the border. They had gone down there with dynamite, and if they saw the British advancing into Thailand, they were going to blow up a wooden bridge that was down there to slow down the advance and then hurry back to Songkhla to report. After the party I couldn't sleep; I couldn't sleep until they got back. They said nothing was happening down there. At the time we didn't know what else to do. It was a ridiculous plan really, when you think about it, trying to blow up a wooden bridge to stop an army. But that's how worried and insecure we felt."

It was now the 7th. 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 nuances in remarks, the tension, and the sense of preparation that came to prevail around the consulate gave everyone there the feeling that the long-awaited landing was about to happen. Mon, the driver, likewise sensed the changing atmosphere at the consulate, and talked to a policeman friend about it. Something was afoot; he could sense it, but of course he did not know what.

Katsuno consumed liquor non-stop as the day passed. He conferred with his three military men. It was 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. Later that day he told everyone to remain at the office; no one was to return to their own residences that night. After the non-Japanese workers had gone home for the day, the machine-gun and handgrenades were brought out into the large front room by the entrance. For some reason, Kashiwabara had also returned to his own house. He had rented his own place away from the consulate, unlike the others who had homes nearby. Mon, the driver, after returning home, talked with one of his neighbors, a worker in the town



government, about the gathering of Japanese at the consulate. The activity over there just was not ordinary; something was going on. The neighbor helped Mon write up a report of what he had witnessed going on at the Japanese consulate which the two then 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 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. With this the two men returned home, and that was the end of the affair.

A hard downpour had started late in the afternoon; but by late evening it had largely let up, and a full moon beamed

out from between the clouds. 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 work in Songkhla. Thus on the night of December 7th, Seto too realized that the time had come. At the consulate all of the staff, minus Kashiwabara, were gathered in one room where they had been eating and drinking. A tension filled the room. Katsuno drank constantly, but the alcohol did not seem to have any effect. Through the small talk and drinking, the thought going through his mind

was, *"Is it finally going to be tomorrow?"* —Not feeling the liquor, Katsuno looked at 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 and drank them down. — *"Is it going to be tomorrow?"* The thought kept running through Katsuno's mind.

In the vicinity of the consulate there was nothing unusual apparent. Looking towards the main part of town, the lights could be seen shining as usual. The army might be landing in a few hours, but nothing around Songkhla had changed. Katsuno put his glass down. It was now past midnight, and he was extremely tired. He had hardly slept since returning from Bangkok. Not knowing if or when the landing might come, he said to everyone, *"I'm going back to my place to get some sleep. If anything happens, come and get me."* Before leaving he again told everyone to stay inside, then he went out and walked alone to his residence that stood about 200 meters away. Before laying down he prepared some clothes. He put out his white foreign service officer dress uniform trimmed with gold buttons and gold braiding. Next to it he laid the matching white helmet and dress saber which was also trimmed with gold braiding. Katsuno had learned in China that when the

army was in action, soldiers were excited and heedless of civilian authority. They only understood rank and a uniform befitting it. Katsuno had found that the impressive foreign service uniform provided a dignity and authority that soldiers instinctively respected.

Kashiwabara had gone home, but he was feeling uneasy. He had not been told of the landing, but by now those uninformed members of the staff had come to sense that tonight was probably the night. He went out to the coast several times that night to check. The whitecaps on the monsoon surf reflected the bright moonlight as the waves thundered monotonously on to the beach. The many weeks of heavy surf had washed away much of the beach creating a sheer meter-high bank at the high-water point. Each time he came to check, Kashiwabara stood near this one-meter drop and peered out over the moonlit beach and the churring sea, but there was no sign of anyone.

The hours ticked by. No one at the consulate slept; they just talked, drank and waited. It was now well past midnight, maybe two or two-thirty in the morning of December 8th. Far off in the distance dogs had begun barking. It was not unusual for dogs to bark during the night, but this night the barking continued, far too nu-

merous and persistent. Something was arousing those animals. Could it be the landing? But no one moved: everyone remained in the consulate.

Perhaps it was the same noise of the dogs that made Kashiwabara wonder. He left his house and headed off to check the coast again. A broad field lay between the town and the coast. As he crossed this, the sea came into view. In the moonlight Kashiwabara caught sight of some black silhouettes of ships lying well off shore. Getting closer to the beach, he was able to see a line of dark silhouettes running parallel to the coast several kilometers off the beach. Excitement filled him as he came once again to the meter-high bank. Down the length of the beach 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 sound of voices. Unable to catch the language, Kashiwabara moved toward several of the nearest figures to ascertain their nationality; but 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.

At the consulate everyone waited; the tension continued; they still knew nothing. Then there came the sound of a large number of footsteps. Nishimaki recalled those moments.

"It was about three o'clock in the morning. We were awake. For the past several nights we had been staying up in shifts. But that night I think we were all up. There came the sound of footsteps, lots of them: 'zahk-zahk-zahk'. We heard them first far away; then they grew louder. It was something strange. We could hear them coming from the direction of the coast. 'What's that sound?' we wondered. 'Sounds like it's coming from the direction of the sea.' We heard that sound growing louder. It almost seemed to be pressing in on us, and the thought in my head was that this was the end. Of course we had the door locked; then at the entrance there was knocking: 'toong-toong-toong'. Well, this was it; they had come. We prepared ourselves, opened the door, and two Japanese officers were standing there, Tsuji and Hayashi, two officers on General Yamashita's staff. 'We've landed,' they said. 'Are you all right?' That was on the morning of the 8th." Itô also remembered that night but did not

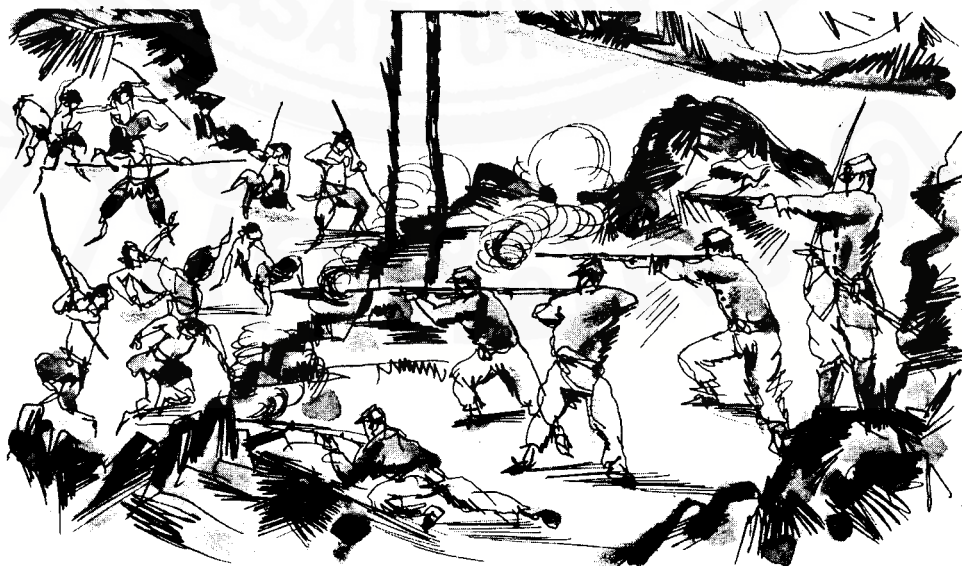
recall any knocking at the door. He remembered Tsuji calling up from the courtyard in front, something like, *"This is Tsuji! Open the door!"*

However that first encounter occurred, it was the first news the people at the consulate had that the landing had begun. Someone shouted at Itô to quickly go and get the consul. Itô ran to Katsuno's house, bursting into his room shouting, *"Consul! Consul! The army has started 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 it.—The alcohol made him unsteady, so Itô helped Katsuno get into his dress uniform. Suddenly Kuboki ran in shouting that the army was landing. The excited major obviously came to hurry the consul along.

Katsuno rushed to the consulate and greeted the two officers. Tsuji Masanobu, then a Lt. Colonel, was one of the important architects of the Malaya invasion. A man of enormous energy and equal impatience, he had hurried ashore in the early stages of the landing to direct operations. Greeting Katsuno quickly, Tsuji told the consul that speed was of the utmost importance. By all means there had to be no resistance from the Thais. Even the smallest delay of the special spearhead unit would upset the whole

opening phase of the campaign. The first thing that Katsuno insisted upon however was the safety of Mr. Oldham. He told Tsuji to make certain the troops did no harm when they went over to secure the British consulate. Though now the enemy, any harm done was sure to grow into an international incident ultimately. Tsuji was anxious to get moving. Securing the British consulate had symbolic significance, but far more important for military operations was making sure no resistance came from the Thai forces. There was a Thai army battalion stationed out at Suan Tun Camp, some four or five kilometers south of town. But the most immediate threat came from the police headquarters which lay on the other side of Tangkuan Hill, not far from the consulate. Katsuno and Tsuji

along with Ōzone climbed into the backseat of the consulate's car. Captain Inobe took the wheel while Iwasaki, as interpreter, sat in front next to him. They would drive around to the British consulate first; Katsuno insisted on satisfying himself that everyone there would be properly looked after. Then they would proceed to police headquarters in an effort to secure the commander's cooperation. The car drove off. War had come. The Japanese consulate at Songkhla had fulfilled its primary mission as a center for gathering intelligence. Now the consul was faced with a new task, to prevent the outbreak of combat between the landing Japanese army and the Thai forces in Songkhla.



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Itō Keisuke	member of the consulate staff and later a member of the F-Kikan
Katsuno Toshio	former consul at Songkhla
Nishimaki Toraō	administrative head of the consulate at Songkhla
Nishino Junjirō	language student, later acting consul at Chiang Mai and member of the embassy staff in Bangkok.
Seto Masao	Born and raised in Thailand, now living in Bangkok
Tsukamoto Masao	language student and later a member of the Songkhla consulate staff
Yasuda Eiichi	managing-director of Mitsui Steamship Company's Bangkok office 1940 - 1945

Interviews with Thais:

Mon Charoensin	former driver for the Japanese consulate in Songkhla
Plaek Silapakamphiset	former Songkhla provincial education officer and prominent citizen of Songkhla
Suchat Ratanaprakan	prominent businessman in Songkhla

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