

Death Railway

TOURISTS

Interview with Mr Mikio Kinoshita –

Imperial Japanese Army & Death Railway Engineer

Firstly I'd like to thank several people for making this interview happen – both Mr Kinoshita for answering my questions and his daughter Ms Sumako Matsuoka for allowing me access to her father, obtaining the answers to my interview and for the various pictures.

Ms Matsuoka questioned her father with my inquiries and responded back in Japanese. I then had the interviews translated.

Thank-you to Scott James and his Japanese Sister-In-Law who translated my first round of questions and Anthony Dykes for arranging Andrew Rowlands to interpret the subsequent answers.

I kept my questions broad with the intention of obtaining a response – bearing in mind I was accessing an elderly man (95 years old) via his daughter – I didn't want them to ignore my interview request if my questioning was overtly abrasive in style etc.

I was interested to see what came back of my questions and I was not surprised by the answers that did not denigrate the Japanese military of the day and those that painted a rosy picture of food and hours worked.



A group of Officials, Monks and Mr Kinoshita standing next to his daughter Ms Matsuoka (she is in Japanese Kimono holding a handbag).

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T O U R I S T S

Interview

Andrew: Is there any Australians you remember that are buried in Thanbyuzayat – what is his story if you can remember?

Mr Kinoshita: I am sorry to say/Unfortunately, I don't know of any Australians out of those who died.

Andrew: What year did you join the Japanese Army?

Mr Kinoshita: March 1941 at 21 years of age, I enlisted in the military to Training Regiment Number 5. (Mikio pictured below age 21 – photo by the UK Telegraph).



Andrew: Can you explain your training, initial recruit training; how long, where was it; what things did you do?

Mr Kinoshita: Together with 46 others of the same age. In Osaka, we were taught to salute and the way of the gun in a short space of time. Mustered together for 3 months, we were then marching to the ship for departure.

Andrew: Were you regularly assaulted by higher ranks in training and in the Army?

Mr Kinoshita: The superior officers, held a joint and several liability to those below them, and never to hit anyone, and it was possible to show a degree of patience to them.

Andrew: Did you work for the Japanese Civilian Railway and what job did you perform there?

Mr Kinoshita: I did Train maintenance for Hankyu Electric Railway Co., Ltd.

Andrew: Did you go to university? (If so – how long and what university?)

Mr Kinoshita: No I did not go to university.

Andrew: Were you involved in the fighting in Malaya and Singapore? If so, where, what role?

Mr Kinoshita: By God, I was in the Battle for Malaya, and after the battle's processing.

Andrew: Where and when did you join the fight in the Pacific?

Mr Kinoshita: Participated in Battle for Malaya 1942.

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T O U R S

Andrew: How did you get to the Burma Railway?

Mr Kinoshita: From the time of our departure from Japan, we were the Railway troops.

Andrew: Where was your first camp on the Burma Railway?

Mr Kinoshita: Anakin 46 km point.

Andrew: Did you move to a lot of camps?

Mr Kinoshita: January 1942 - Stationed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

February 1942 – Stationed in Singapore.

27 March 1942 - landed in Rangoon.

1942 - Stationed at Anakin 46km Point.

January 1943 - Sittang River Bridge construction.

June 1943 - Thai-Burma Railway construction work, and Burmese side Thanbyuzayat approach.

January 1944 - Station Master at Mornin.

1944 - Moga Wim East - Stationed in the Nankai du Village

September 1944 - Stationed at Kandu 320km point.



Mr Kinoshita at the Burma end of the railway (2014)

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T O U R S



Mr Kinoshita in Burma (2014)

Andrew: What type of engineering work did you perform on the railway?

Mr Kinoshita: When laying down the rail for the Burma railway, creating the foundations, and the sub-base construction, 110 Australians taken prisoner and 200 local workers were engaged.

Andrew: What type of hours did you work?

Mr Kinoshita: For the works above, 0900 to 1700hrs.

Andrew: A Yasume (rest) day for you was how often?

Mr Kinoshita: *No answer given.*



Mr Kinoshita riding the Death Railway (2014)

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T O U R S

Andrew: I understand the monsoon was very bad through 1943 – how did this hamper the working conditions for the men?

Mr Kinoshita: I do not remember that monsoon. The terrible rain made it a hard. On those rainy days - an extra day of rest was given to the Prisoners of War.

Andrew: What food did you eat whilst an Engineer typically on any given day?

Mr Kinoshita: Food – Rice, bread (rations) chicken, rice, vegetables - locally sourced seasonal vegetables. In my area the working prisoners had the same diet.

Andrew: Why did the Speedo come about – why did it start?

Mr Kinoshita: *Question mark only.*

Andrew: What hours did the POWs work during the Speedo?

Mr Kinoshita: Prisoners of war and Japanese are worked same hours – 0900 to 1700hrs.

Andrew: Did you eat the same food as the POWs on the railway?

Mr Kinoshita: We ate All the same foods.

Andrew: Did you suffer any illness whilst working on the railway?

Mr Kinoshita: Experienced Malaria.



Ms Sumako Matsuoka, her father and some local kids. (2014)

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Andrew: What medicines were available at your camp for the Engineers?

Mr Kinoshita: We had Quinine.

Andrew: What direct engineering did you perform – what engineering work are you most proud of?

Mr Kinoshita: Job pride from prisoners and locals cooperating and working together in completing tasks.

Andrew: What Australian doctors did you meet on the railway?

Mr Kinoshita: There was one Australian doctor.

Andrew: Did you know the Australians were getting some trading goods from the Thais/Burmese?

Mr Kinoshita: We knew they had received some things. I also received various goods from the local people.

Andrew: Did you liaise directly with the doctors on the numbers required each day for the railway work?

Mr Kinoshita: It was still required that sick people were brought to watch.

Andrew: If a man could stand he was fit for work. Did you have the same camp procedure?

Mr Kinoshita: Sick people were never strongly forced to do that type of work.

Andrew: The 'Tavoy 8' escaped and were recaptured under Australian Warrant Officer Quittenton – all eight Australians were sadly executed – were you present or at that camp?

Mr Kinoshita: *No answer*

Andrew: What would you do in your camp if you could not get the numbers for the work parties?

Mr Kinoshita: I don't have an idea on the content of inquiry but when it rained there were days of no work. I remember seeing the Australian soldiers' playing cards. They also enjoyed being together.

Andrew: What was your favourite place during the war on the Burma Railway to visit?

Mr Kinoshita: It was such a long time ago – I would have to say Anakin was one of my favourite places.

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Andrew: Alive or dead – who would you most like to visit and have dinner with one last time (Railway era)?

Mr Kinoshita: *No answer.*

Andrew: You would know there was a lot of cruelty metered out to the POWs to get them to work hard and long hours – did you witness POWs being assaulted? If so, what did you see?

Mr Kinoshita: I did not witness Prisoners of War being assaulted, and the times of absolutely dreadful violence that everyone talks about. Still for Australian soldiers, they say that the violence was a part of the existence.

Andrew: Were you moved on from the railway after its completion? Where did you go and how did you get there?

Mr Kinoshita: From the completed Thai Burma Railway, from January 1944, I was the stationmaster in the Mornin Northern Chin State, Burma.

Andrew: What fighting were you involved with in Burma?

Mr Kinoshita: I did not fight in the battles but, there was still quite a risk in the transport and the loading and unloading of military supplies.

Andrew: Do you think the Burma Railway achieved its purpose of bringing enough supplies to the Japanese forces in Burma to fight the British? Did it help with supply or was it not effective?

Mr Kinoshita: *No answer.*

Andrew: Post war I understand you re-visit Myanmar. What have you done there?

Mr Kinoshita: During the 39 years has visited 25 times. Initially it was comrade's memorials, but now a memorial for everyone involved. And make donations to local elementary schools or temples. From during the war I meet the people again, we are able to meet annually. With the younger generations we have a family.

Specifically for the people who died there the names are written in ink. Placing a white cloth on the plaque. The place where people died, offering flowers, incense sticks, and prayers.

All comrades in arms who died, gone to the land, each time the same thing. At that time we offer best wishes to everyone. Best Wishes.

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A graphic of a railway track with the word "TOURISTS" written in white capital letters on a black rectangular sign placed across the tracks.

Andrew: Post war did you return to railway work in Japan?

Mr Kinoshita: I went back to the Hankyu Electric Railway Co., Ltd.

Andrew: Did you go straight back to Japan after the Japanese surrender or were you imprisoned?

Mr Kinoshita: After the Surrender I came back home to Japan. I was not in jail. When I returned home, I say to everyone "After where I was coming back from, from this point I will serve the people of the world". I placed myself in many area important areas of work till the age of 94. In 2013 I received a medal for many years work in regional crime prevention work.

Andrew: Were you able to keep up with current affairs and how Japan was fearing in the war during the railway construction?

Mr Kinoshita: No Answer.

Andrew: Did you have your own radio for news broadcasts?

Mr Kinoshita: No I did not have a radio

Andrew: Did you smoke?

Mr Kinoshita: No I did not. But the prisoners were given a distribution (ration)

Andrew: Were you concerned what the POWs would do after the war and how the survivors would react?

Mr Kinoshita: I spoke to the prisoners of war one by one (to thank them) and shook hands as we parted. Because I was filled with gratitude. Especially as they were returning home I was not worried about them.

Andrew: Were you involved post war in reburying the Allied soldiers in Thanbyuzayat and Kanchanaburi?

Mr Kinoshita: *No answer.*

Andrew: What was the hardest day you were involved with during the construction of the railway?

Mr Kinoshita: Days of heavy rain in the rainy season.

Andrew: Do you think the railway was planned many years (even decades before) or was it something that was planned in a hurry?

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Mr Kinoshita: I do not know since when it was planned. The command to have operational in less than 1 year turned out to be an enormous task.

Andrew: Who was the highest ranking Japanese Officer you saw on the Burma Railway?

Mr Kinoshita: The name I do not remember but, The Burma Army Commander I think.

Andrew: Did you attend the joining ceremony at Koncoita?

Mr Kinoshita: I did not go there.

Ms Sumako Matsuoka also made the following comments:

“My father enjoyed his time working with an Australian Prisoner of War Captain consulting with him on various tasks. He would always tell us they worked very well under very harsh conditions.

I think a friendship grew. The Australian Captain would not have to consult/work on a rainy day. I heard they liked to play cards and the like together.

When the Burma Railway was finished and they departed, they say most Australian prisoners tried to shake hands and say thank you.

Even now I say I would like to meet the Captain he worked with at that time.

Old pictures show I look at someone I don't even know.

During fathers stories he would say there is nothing at all to come out from acts of violence. Rather, he often said Regular Japanese soldiers absolutely did not abuse.

Because of this even after 70 years I think it makes you want to see the time they worked together with the Australia prisoners.

The following article is available on-line to read further on this Japanese Engineer:

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/23/national/japanese-british-death-railway-veterans-meet-73-years/#.VrQ6VPI961s>