

The Burma Campaign Society and a delegation of Shonai, Yamagata Prefecture came to York. Monday 5th and Tuesday 6th November 2013.

The mayoral delegation of 17 people came to York to further enhance the educational, cultural and business links between Japan and United Kingdom focusing on the City of York.

They were accompanied by 7 members of BCS including Akiko Macdonald Chair of BCS and Rev. Sato Director of Three Wheels Buddhist Temple in London

They have also a particular interest in the battle of Kohima where The Japanese general Koturo Sato commander of the 31st Division and John L. Grover of the British 2nd Division (York) were opposing commanders who fought at Kohima.

Kohima is a hill town in North-East India. From April to June 1944 the location of one of the most bitterly fought battles of WWII. For the first time the Japanese were defeated



The delegation of Shonai

The Battle of Kohima was the turning point of the [Japanese U Go offensive](#) into [India](#) in 1944 during the [Second World War](#). The battle was fought in three stages from 4 April to 22 June 1944 around the town of [Kohima](#) in [Nagaland](#) in northeast India. From 3 to 16 April, the Japanese attempted to capture Kohima ridge, a feature which dominated the road by which the besieged [British](#) and [Indian](#) troops of [IV Corps](#) at [Imphal](#) were supplied. By mid-April, the small British and Indian force at Kohima was relieved. From 18 April to 13 May, British and Indian reinforcements counter-attacked to drive the Japanese from the positions they had captured. The Japanese abandoned the ridge at this point but continued to block the Kohima–Imphal road. From 16 May to 22 June, the British and Indian troops pursued the retreating Japanese and reopened the road. The battle ended on 22 June when British and Indian troops from Kohima and Imphal met at Milestone 109, ending the [Siege of Imphal](#).

General Sato was born in 1893 and died in 1959 in Shonai.

As a lieutenant, general, he was assigned command of the [IJA 31st Division](#) from the time of its activation in China in March, 1943. Assigned to construction operations in [Thailand](#), the division was ordered to [Burma](#) to join the [IJA 15th Army](#) in September, 194

The Japanese plan to invade India, codenamed [U-Go](#), was originally intended as a spoiling attack against the [IV Corps](#) at Imphal, to disrupt the [Allied](#) offensive plans for that year. The commander of the Japanese Fifteenth Army, [Lieutenant General Renya Mutaguchi](#), enlarged the plan to invade India itself and perhaps even overthrow the [British Raj](#)

By the middle of May, Sato's troops were starving. He considered that Mutaguchi and the HQ of Japanese Fifteenth Army were taking little notice of his situation, as they had issued several confusing and contradictory orders to him during April.^[4] Because the main attack on Imphal faltered around the middle of April, Mutaguchi wished 31st Division or parts of it to join in the attack on Imphal from the north, even while the division was struggling to capture and hold Kohima. Sato considered that his division was being "messed around" without proper planning or consideration for the conditions. Nor did Sato believe that Fifteenth Army headquarters were exerting themselves to move supplies to his division.^[5] He began pulling his troops back to conserve their strength, thus allowing the British to secure Kohima Ridge.

General Sato disobeying the orders of his superior to attack and deciding to retreat saved the lives of thousands of Japanese soldiers.

A monument was erected in his memory in Shonai.

The delegation was very interested in seeing the Kohima Museum and the 2nd Division of York who fought General Sato. At their arrival they were welcomed by Bob Cook the curator of the museum and Brigadier Bibby commander of the York Barracks.

On Monday morning, we assisted to a mass in memory of the Japanese and British soldiers who died in Burma at the wonderful cathedral of York Minster,



The delegation at the Memorial Wall



The Mayor of Shonai and Akiko Macdonald laid a wreath

After the service, we went to the 2ND Division Memorial Wall where the Mayor of Shonai and Akiko Macdonald laid a wreath in presence of the Dean of York Minster who prayed for the dead. Rev. Sato recited a Sutra.



The delegation on its way to St John University



The exchange of cards with the Provost

The delegation visited York St John's University where a lunch was prepared. It was decided to exchange British and Japanese students for York and Shonai City.

In the evening, we had a dinner in Novotel Hotel with Bob Cook the curator and other members of the Kohima Museum. Tuesday morning the Japanese minister joined the delegation to visit the Kohima museum where they received a very warm welcome from the Brigadier Bibby commander of the York Barracks, the Curator of the Museum Bob Cook and his collaborators. They visited the Museum looking at the Japanese collection from the battle of Kohima.



At the Kohima Museum with Brigadier Bibby, Akiko Macdonald and Bob Cook



Bob Cook explaining the collection

We were invited for a lunch at the officers 'mess of the York Imperial Barracks by the Brigadier Bibby. We could meet and talk to his friendly staff officers. Presents were exchanged, the mayor of Shonai received the double Keys

representing the 2nd Division and Brigadier Bibby received a temari ball.



The lunch at the Officers' mess



The Mayor of Shonai receiving the double Keys

After the lunch, we went to the Memorial Wall where the Japanese Minister laid a wreath and Rev, Sato conducted a Buddhist service.



The Japanese Minister laid a wreath



The Rt Hon. the Lord Mayor Cllr Julie Gunnell offered the seal to the Mayor of Shonai

The Rt Hon. the Lord Mayor Cllr Julie Gunnell received the delegation at the York Mansion House hoping to improve cultural, educational and business links between York and Shonai. She offered a seal of the City of York and she received a temari ball.

At 5:55 we all took the train to London.

Lucien Chocron