

■ We should draw the reader's attention to the fact that this apparently unpublished paper reached us with the footnotes missing. We felt it appropriate to retain the footnote references in the text.

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Mutaguchi and the Invasion of India (Imphal, 1944)



BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LIEUTENANT-GENERAL MUTAGUCHI RENYA

Mutaguchi Renya was born in Saga Prefecture, Kyushu, on 7 October 1888, as Fukuchi Renya, and was adopted at an early age into the family of a relative, Mutaguchi Moritsune. In 1908 he entered the Military Academy, from which he was posted as second lieutenant to the 13th Infantry Regiment in 1910. He entered the Staff College in 1914, and four years later was attached to the General Staff Office (Sanbō Honbu). By 1920 he was a captain, and in 1926 was given command of a battalion in the Guards Division (4th Konoe Infantry Regiment). An attachment to the Ordnance Department at the War Ministry in 1927 was followed by promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel in 1930 and an appointment at the General Staff, General Affairs Section. A colonel in 1934, he was in command of the 1st Infantry Regiment, stationed at Peking, in 1936, becoming a major general attached to Kwantung Army GHQ in 1938. During all this period he seems to have belonged to the Kōdōha, or Imperial Way faction in the Army, and, as he says himself, was responsible for extending the zone of conflict in China at the Marco Polo Bridge Incident at Peking in 1937. After a spell as chief of staff, 14 Army, in 1938, and as head of the Military Academy in 1939, he became a lieutenant general in 1940 and the following year, 10 April 1941, he was given command of the prestigious 18 Division, known as the Kiku (Chrysanthemum) Division, of tough fighting men from his own island of Kyushu. He led them into the Malayan campaign and the capture of Singapore, which he was later to chronicle briefly in 'Buki Tema kōchi no zenbō' (The heights of Bukit Timah) (*Bungei Shunjū*, Special issue, 12 November 1955, pp. 27-32).

The division left Singapore for Burma where, on 18 March 1943, he was given the command that was to prove his undoing and lead to the deaths of thousands of his fellow countrymen: General Officer Commanding 15 Army. Imperial General Headquarters authorised an operation for the defence of Burma, aimed at the British bases in the Imphal Plain in Manipur State, on 7 January 1944, after months of debate between Tokyo, Singapore (Southern Army), Rangoon (Burma Area Army)

and 15 Army in Maymyo.

The offensive began on 8 March 1944 with an assault by 33 Division on 17 Indian Division, followed a week later by 31 Division's march on Kohima and 15 Division's cutting of the Imphal-Kohima road. Mutaguchi had planned to take Imphal with no more than three divisions and a tank regiment, in the space of three weeks. In the event, the British fought him off, the plan ran to a standstill, and by 5 June 1944 Mutaguchi was ready to admit defeat. In the end, pressures from Tokyo and Rangoon kept his forces in the battle until 7 July 1944, when Lieutenant General Kawabe, GOC Burma Area Army, authorised him to draw the campaign to an end.

It was to have been the perfect blitzkrieg or, as Mutaguchi saw it in terms of the quasi-mythical mediaeval hero Yoshitsune who defeated the Taira clan by speedily coming upon them over the Hiyodorigoe and putting them to flight, it was to be a 'Hiyodorigoe campaign'. But Mutaguchi had miscalculated his enemy's air superiority, his battle-readiness and plentiful supplies. He had relied too much on the superb Japanese infantryman and the Japanese spirit – *Yamato-damashii* or *Nippon seishin* – that drove him on. In the end, *Nippon seishin* was overwhelmed by weight of numbers and superior fire-power.

The failure at Imphal was, up to that date, the most disastrous defeat the Japanese Army had known in its entire history. Mutaguchi and nearly all his staff, as well as the GOC Burma Area Army, were removed, in an unprecedented series of sackings. On 30 August 1944, Mutaguchi was attached to the General Staff GHQ, as a form of dismissal, and placed on the reserve in December. The following month he was made head of the reserve Military Academy, but never again held a fighting command. In 1964, he published a justification of his Imphal campaign and his vision of an invasion of India which would have changed the course of the war. On 2 August, 1966, he died at the age of seventy-eight.

Mutaguchi Renya was a man exuberantly confident of his own destiny. As if to emphasise by contrast the tragic depths to which his ambition later led him, his first two major interventions in the history of the Japanese Army were outstanding successes. It was he who exploited the Marco Polo Bridge incident in 1937, and brought fresh Army strength into China. It was he who led 18 Division from China to Malaya and, under the command of General Yamashita, drove the British out of Singapore. As commander to the 15 Army in Burma he intended to complete a hat-trick: he would lead the Japanese in the invasion of India, completing the downfall of the British in the East. The British would be driven out of the war in Asia, America would lose her closest ally and be forced to sue for peace. He, Mutaguchi, would achieve this consummation. How he failed is quite Chaucerian in its clarity of definition:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bokes maken us memorie,
Of him that stood in greet prosperitee
And is y-fallen out of heigh degree,
Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly. . .¹

Or, as the Japanese proverb puts it, perhaps more succinctly, 'the proud Taira do not rule for ever (Ogoru Heike wa hisashikarazu)'.

Mutaguchi's first real attempt to influence Japan's destiny overseas came in the Marco Polo Bridge episode in 1937. Its origins lie in the settlement imposed upon a prostrate China after the suppression of the Boxer rising. Resentful at repeated western depredations in China, the Boxer rising was a futile attempt by the Chinese to drive out foreigners. It ended in the siege of foreign legations in Peking and the massacre of foreign missionaries and native Christians. The legations were relieved