

# Nikkei **NIKKEI** national museum & cultural centre **IMAGES**



Sgt. Masumi Mitsui, MM at the relighting ceremony of the Japanese Canadian War Memorial in Stanley Park, 1985. Sgt. Mitsui is being pushed in a wheelchair by Mr. Frank Kamiya, who has been involved in the JC War Memorial Committee since before 1985. NNM 1992.23 Frank Kamiya Collection.



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# Contents



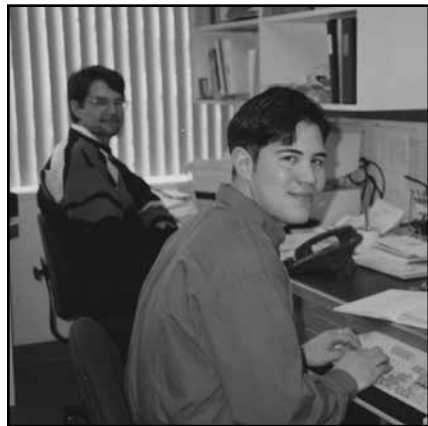
Seiichi Kinoshita:  
Resolute Soldier and Patriot  
*Page 4*



“Gone but Not Forgotten”: My  
Family’s Story of Remembrance  
and Loss | *Page 12*



The Korean War in the  
Land of the Morning Calm  
*Page 18*



The Birth of Nikkei Images:  
An Idea Becomes Reality  
*Page 22*



Treasures from the Vault  
*Back Cover*



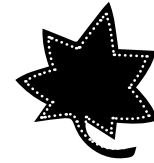
*Nikkei Images* Editorial Committee 2009. Back Row from left: Frank Kamiya, Stan Fukawa, Kaye Kishibe, Carl Yokota, Moe Yesaki. Front Row, Beth Carter, Linda Kawamoto Reid. Missing from the photo: Grace Hama, Christine Kondo, Edzard Tuebert. Photo courtesy Linda Kawamoto Reid.

## Submissions


We welcome proposals of family and community stories for publication in future issues. Articles should be between 500 – 3,500 words and finished works should be accompanied by relevant high resolution photographs with proper photo credits. Please send a brief description or summary of the theme and topic of your proposed article to [tpeters@nikkeiplace.org](mailto:tpeters@nikkeiplace.org). Our publishing agreement can be found online at [center.nikkeiplace.org/nikkei-images](http://center.nikkeiplace.org/nikkei-images)

We, the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples; and in particular, the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Kwikwetlem First Nations on whose territory we stand.

## We Remember



We remember that in January 1996, the very first issue of *Nikkei Images* was published.



We remember the intrepid volunteers and *nikkei* community members who so generously gave of their time and talents to contribute each year, sometimes up to three times per year, to a museum publication that honours, preserves, and shares Japanese Canadian history and heritage through stories. To list everyone's names who have made *Nikkei Images* possible for two and a half decades would take more space than I have, so I invite you to investigate our online archive to discover these invaluable contributors. You can find all of our issues over the past 25 years online at [centre.nikkeiplace.org/research/nikkei-images](http://centre.nikkeiplace.org/research/nikkei-images)

We remember that many of the stories in *Nikkei Images* have had further outreach in *Discover Nikkei*, the online transnational *nikkei* story portal of the Japanese American National Museum, and on the pages of *Nikkei Voice*, a national Japanese Canadian newspaper that connects community across Canada. We thank our friends at both publications for their ongoing support and interest in our volumes.

Lest we forget, we dedicate this issue of our 25th year to the Japanese Canadian War Memorial and all vets of Japanese ancestry in Canada.

With gratitude and respect,

Sherri Kajiwaru  
Nikkei National Museum Director/Curator

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# Seiichi Kinoshita: Resolute Soldier and Patriot

by David B. Iwaasa

On June 12, 1945, a small news item appeared in the lower part of the front page of the *Vancouver Daily Province* newspaper. It was titled, “Japanese Veterans Cast Ballots at Hope”. The article, with the spelling corrected, stated:

“Two Japanese from Tashme evacuation camp cast their votes here in Monday’s federal election. They were Saburo Sato and Sechi [Seiichi]<sup>1</sup> Kinoshita, who produced documents to show they were honourably discharged veterans of Canada’s armed forces in [the] First World War. They were permitted to vote after taking the oath of allegiance.”<sup>2</sup>

This article is significant for three reasons: 1) it is tangible recognition that although Canada was still at war with Imperial Japan, the sacrifices of the Japanese Canadian soldiers who served for Canada in the First World War and their right to vote (approved in 1931) were being recognized; 2) despite being dispossessed of their property and incarcerated in a remote, guarded camp, two Japanese Canadian veterans found a way to travel the nearly 21 km from their camp to the town of Hope to vote in a Canadian federal election, and 3) one of those two veterans was my great uncle on my mother’s side, Seiichi Kinoshita.

In British Columbia, Japanese Canadians had been denied the right to vote in provincial elections since 1895, and, as the same voters’ lists were used, they were also denied the right to vote in federal elections. This continued until 1931 when Japanese Canadian veterans of the First World War were extended the right

to vote by legislation which squeezed through the BC Provincial legislature by just one vote. However, only the veterans themselves were given the franchise and it was not extended to family members or the rest of the community.

Seiichi Kinoshita was the second son of Iwajiro Kinoshita and Tsuru Nakamura, born in 1898<sup>3</sup> in Fukui prefecture on the coast of the Japan Sea. Life was difficult in Fukui and in 1913, at the age of 15, Seiichi emigrated to Canada with his father and older brother and worked various jobs, including on the railroad. In 1915, with Japan allied with the United Kingdom in the First World War, the Canadian Japanese Association in Vancouver sought to create an all-Japanese battalion. Despite not having any official approval from the Canadian military, the Canadian Japanese Association decided in December to form a self-supported volunteer militia, with the Association paying for the room and board of the volunteers, the cost of instructors, and the rental of a drill hall. By January 1916, some 202 young men had volunteered.<sup>4</sup> Seiichi was among this first group of volunteers and began training at Cordova Hall three nights a week. Unfortunately, the dream of an all-Japanese battalion was not realized as there were too few men to form a full battalion,<sup>5</sup> and many politicians in British Columbia were opposed to allowing Canadians of Asian heritage to enlist.<sup>6</sup>

Officially, the dream of an all-Japanese unit ended when the Canadian Japanese Association received a

telegram from the Canadian military on May 5, 1916, which stated, “Enlistment of Japanese at present time not recommended.”<sup>7</sup> However, individual Japanese Canadians from the West Coast found that they could enlist in Alberta, as many Alberta units were desperate to find new recruits. Despite having no money and only a vague idea of what lay ahead, Seiichi said that he was one of the first of the Japanese to join up.<sup>8</sup> Not being able to join in BC, he boarded a train to Calgary, enlisting on May 8, 1916, just three days after the Canadian Japanese Association was told that the army was not recommending their enlistment.

Seiichi signed up to join the 13th Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, originally a Medicine Hat unit. Others quickly followed and by the end of May, some 42 Japanese Canadians from the original Vancouver group were training in Sarcee Camp near Calgary. After a quick six-week basic training course, the group left Medicine Hat with their battalion by train on June 22.

After a brief stop in Winnipeg to take on more troops, the train arrived in Ottawa on June 26th where they were inspected by the Governor General, Duke of Connaught. Next, they traveled to Halifax where they embarked for England aboard the troop carrier, the SS Olympic, with soldiers from five other battalions. The ship arrived in Liverpool on July 5th and on the very same day, the men boarded a train which took them to the training camp at Shorncliffe, about 40 miles from London. According to reports from some of the men, they were surprised when, around 9:00 pm as they passed through London, a crowd of English people were out to cheer them at the station.<sup>9</sup>

Once in camp, the party atmosphere quickly faded. They were told about the heavy losses the allies had suffered the previous year and the training was

considerably stricter than it had been in Canada. All the men and officers of the battalion, including the battalion commander, lived in tents and their days started at 5:30 am and there was never an idle moment. Shorncliffe Camp was only two miles from the Straits of Dover, and the men said they could hear the cannons firing on the battle fronts

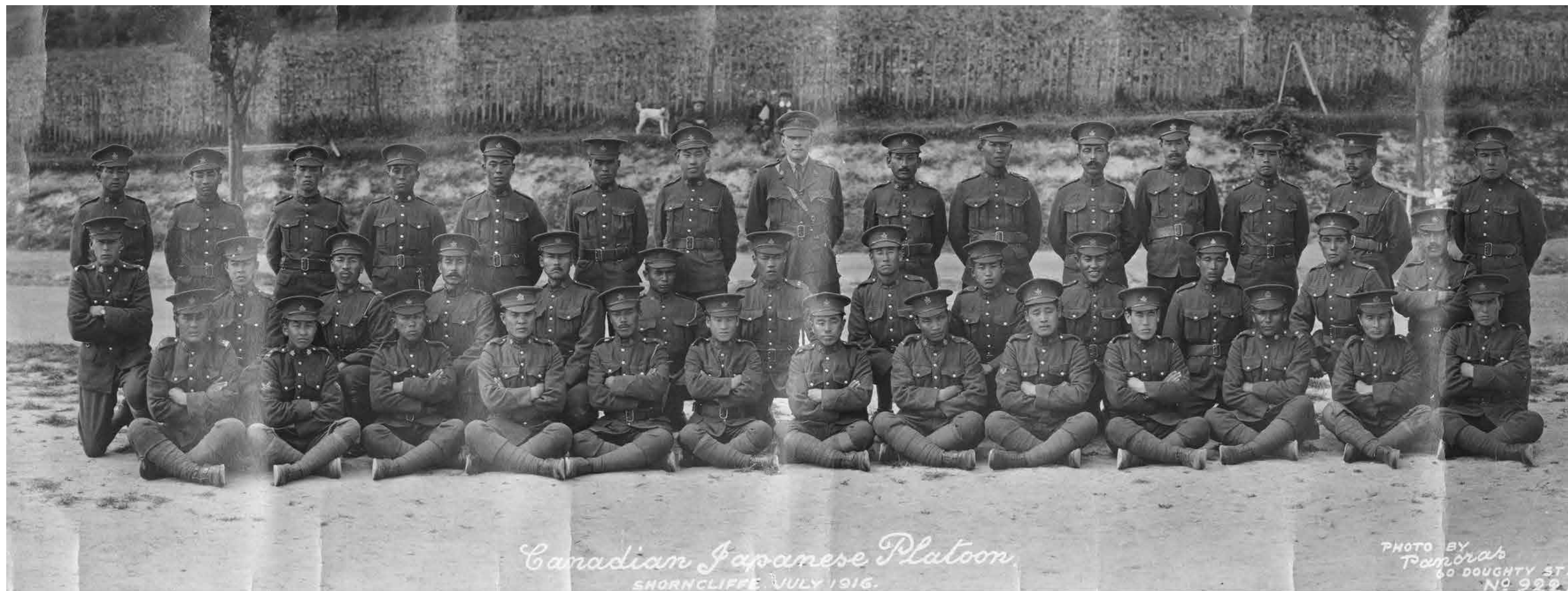
in France. Near the end of July, many of the new battalions from Canada were consolidated into existing Canadian units as replacements for earlier casualties. The Japanese Canadians were merged into the veteran Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry Battalion preparatory to leaving for the front lines on September 18, 1916.<sup>10</sup>

Once in France, the Japanese Canadians found themselves transferred once again to the 52nd Infantry Battalion in early October, just in time to participate in the Battle of the Somme. The Japanese Canadian soldiers became aware of the grim reality of the war almost immediately. Seiichi said that in the Battle of the Somme, he was buried as a result of shellfire

and his right ear became partially deaf from the explosion.<sup>11</sup> However, he quickly returned to be with his fellow Japanese Canadian soldiers. His mates, however, were not spared, with one of their number wounded by shrapnel on October 7th and the first of their group, Teikichi Shichi, being killed on October 9. Iku Kumagawa, one of Seiichi’s comrades wrote on November 9 that, “there were 42 Japanese soldiers at the beginning, but now, because of deaths, sickness and injury, only 31 are battle-worthy.”<sup>12</sup> In December 1917, Seiichi was wounded again. Although he makes no mention of this wound in his 1947 letter where he recounted his war wounds, his medical records show that he was transferred to the 8th Canadian Field Ambulance on December 11th and to #51 General Hospital in Etaples, France on December 19, 1917.



Seiichi Kinoshita in England, ca 1918. Courtesy of the Kinoshita Family



Canadian Japanese Platoon, Shorncliffe England, 1916. Seiichi is in middle row, fifth from the right. NNM TD 959 JC War Memorial Collection.

During this period, Seiichi made the following comments in a letter to Canada: “I am in a rest camp six miles behind the front. Duty in the front line during the day is not bad, but night duty, five in the afternoon to seven in the morning, is physically hard and dangerous. We are always tired, wet and cold. We take turns resting for three hours. The enemy is only sixty yards away. When men leave for sentry duty, we always say good-bye and good luck. We can never tell what might happen to any one of us. We go on duty in the front line for six days and rest for one day. We are then able to wash with warm water...but only our faces. We were paid fifteen francs, or three dollars, for the week. There are rats as large as cats and when they get caught in the barbed wire their cries are frightening. The artillery fire is fierce, and we dare

not move around too much. I do not like lice, but we all joke about it and ask, ‘How many did you catch today?’ The number of lice one catches indicates whether one is a newcomer or an old-timer. I caught 52. Some men boast that they have killed 70...There are eleven Japanese in my platoon.”<sup>13</sup>

On April 1, 1918, during the Battle of Lens, he received a five-inch shrapnel wound in his right thigh. This resulted in his being hospitalized for some two-and-a-half months. In August of 1918, during the Battle of Arras, Seiichi described in his 1947 letter a battle incident that he never forgot:

“In a dawn charge, I over-advanced a few hundred yards and was caught out in no-man’s land. A certain Lieutenant of the company crawled out to me in the

shell-hole to call me back to safety. (It may seem strange to you, but I never got to know his name. At the time, the fighting was so stiff that replacements were coming continuously. He was one of them.) In the meantime, the crossfire became so thick that we were both trapped in the same shell-hole. We were in a position where we could neither go ahead nor back without risking certain death. After talking things over, we decided to charge the machine gun nest which was causing our troop so much trouble. Just as we were about to emerge from the shell-hole, a machine gun bullet caught the Lieutenant in the head, and he died instantly beside me. Alone now, but having decided already, I charged the machine gun nest. After throwing three grenades into the nest in rapid

succession, I went over. Instead of the expected three or four enemies, there were 14 of them, crouched there in the nest. Fortunately for me, none of them had looked yet and I was able to cover with my gun. Thus, it was that I was able to return to our lines safely...On bringing back the 13 prisoners (I had to shoot one in the leg in self-defence), I turned them over to a certain Sergeant Roy who, in turn, escorted them to the rear. If I remember correctly, he received a D.C.M. (Distinguished Conduct Medal) in due course. I received no recognition whatsoever. I thought it rather irregular at the time, but I said nothing and let the matter go at that.” Later in the same letter, Seiichi noted, “There is another thing I wish to find out...that is, to find out all I can about the brave Lieutenant who

lost his life in attempting to help me. Throughout all these years, I have thought of him in silent gratitude. What was his name? Did he have a wife? Children? ... All these things, somehow, mean very much to me, even now after the passage of nearly 30 years.”<sup>14</sup>

Seiichi received a rifle wound on his right arm during that same battle. He states, “I returned to the front after getting the wound dressed at a dressing station.” Later that year, at the Battle of Cambrai, on October 1, 1918, Seiichi received a shrapnel wound on his left hand. This resulted in his being hospitalized and eventually he was sent back to England to recuperate. The war ended while he was in hospital, and he was finally discharged in March 1919 so that he could return to Canada.

In 1919, immediately after being discharged from the army, drawing on a loan from the Soldier Settlement Board (SSB), Seiichi purchased a partially cleared, 26.82-acre farm in Coghlan in Langley township. However, what had been represented to him as having seven acres of cleared land turned out to be only about one-half acre or so of cleared land. As he stated in his letter many years later, “I did see the land before the purchase, but being totally inexperienced in the method of land measure, I was helplessly ignorant as to just how many acres were cleared. The fact that the S.S.B. inspector passed this figure seems to indicate an unpardonable negligence on his part. Coupled with my ignorance, this negligence [resulted in] a very unfair evaluation of the property.”<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, Seiichi accepted what he had received and what followed was more than a decade of back-breaking labour to clear virgin forest land.

Despite the unbelievable struggle, Seiichi was able to make improvements to the land, harvest some crops, and make progress in his situation. On March 31, 1931, he was sufficiently secure to marry Fumie Takaoka, a *nisei* born in Vancouver. A son, Takeshi, and a daughter, Shizuka, arrived in quick succession, but so did the Great Depression and its impact on farm prices. As a consequence, in 1938 Seiichi appealed to the courts to have his original land price re-evaluated. Given the reality of the original state of the farm when he took possession, he was successful in having the original value of some \$2,000 cut down to a balance payable of \$1,160. With a lower loan payment and the gradual recovery of the local economy, things began to improve for the family. They now had a two-

story house with nine rooms, a chicken house, barn, woodshed, bunk house, truck, and other tools.<sup>16</sup> Life was getting better when Japan bombed Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

In the midst of the confusion and chaos that roiled the community with the Government’s formal announcement of mass evacuation of “any person of the Japanese race” on February 26, 1942, Seiichi indicates that being a veteran of the First World War, he was “drafted by the Legion (Royal Canadian Legion, Branch #9 – the all-Japanese Canadian branch) to serve as a guard at the Hasting Park when the government interned the Japanese there.”<sup>17</sup> Consistent with his view that he was simply taking up a temporary assignment as a veteran, he moved his family to Vancouver, leaving everything at his farm as it was. “Needless to say, I never expected to be forcibly evacuated from the coast. I expected to go back to my farm just as soon as conditions permitted... Then when I was ordered to leave for Tashme in September [1942], it was such a hurried and confused departure....”<sup>18</sup>

As indicated in his letter, Seiichi was shocked when he was ordered to move with his family to the Tashme internment camp, leaving everything he and his family had struggled to accumulate since returning from the war. In 1947, at the time of the Bird Commission hearings for compensation for wartime losses, Seiichi made it clear that he had not recognized the Custodian’s sale of his property. He also stated, “I want my property back if it is at all possible...in all fairness to my family, who will be the ones to suffer, I feel that I should speak up for what should rightfully belong to me. And also, if I should get any at all, it would be a valuable precedent for some other veteran to follow.”<sup>19</sup> At this time, Seiichi and his family had left BC to move east of the Rockies as a result of the so-called “loyalty test”. They were living in Barnwell, Alberta, working in the sugar beet fields. Needless to say, Seiichi was not able to get his property back or a reasonable settlement via the Bird Commission. A sad commentary on how Canada treated one of its faithful veterans.

It is ironic, however, that among the documents contained in Seiichi Kinoshita’s files kept as part of the Bird Commission hearings and revealed as part of the Landscapes of Injustice project in 2020, was a letter dated January 22, 1951, to the Custodian of Enemy Property from the office of the Soldier Settlement and



Seiichi Kinoshita in uniform soon after enlisting, ca 1916. Courtesy of the Kinoshita Family

Veterans’ Land Act. In the letter, Mr. G.E. Burrell, the Acting District Superintendent, wrote: “Re: Former Japanese Lands in B.C. This Department has been holding off the market certain lands purchased from the Custodian formerly owned by Japanese veterans or Soldier Settlers. Our Head Office has been discussing the disposal of these lands with Mr. K.W. Wright, Chief Counsel, Custodian’s Office, Department of the Secretary of State, and before selling the lands in question it will be necessary to get a clearance from the respective Japanese involved. This Department has no addresses of the Japanese veterans and Soldier Settlers, but it is understood that you have the information on your files.”<sup>20</sup> Among the six Japanese Canadian veterans listed in this letter is Seiichi Kinoshita.

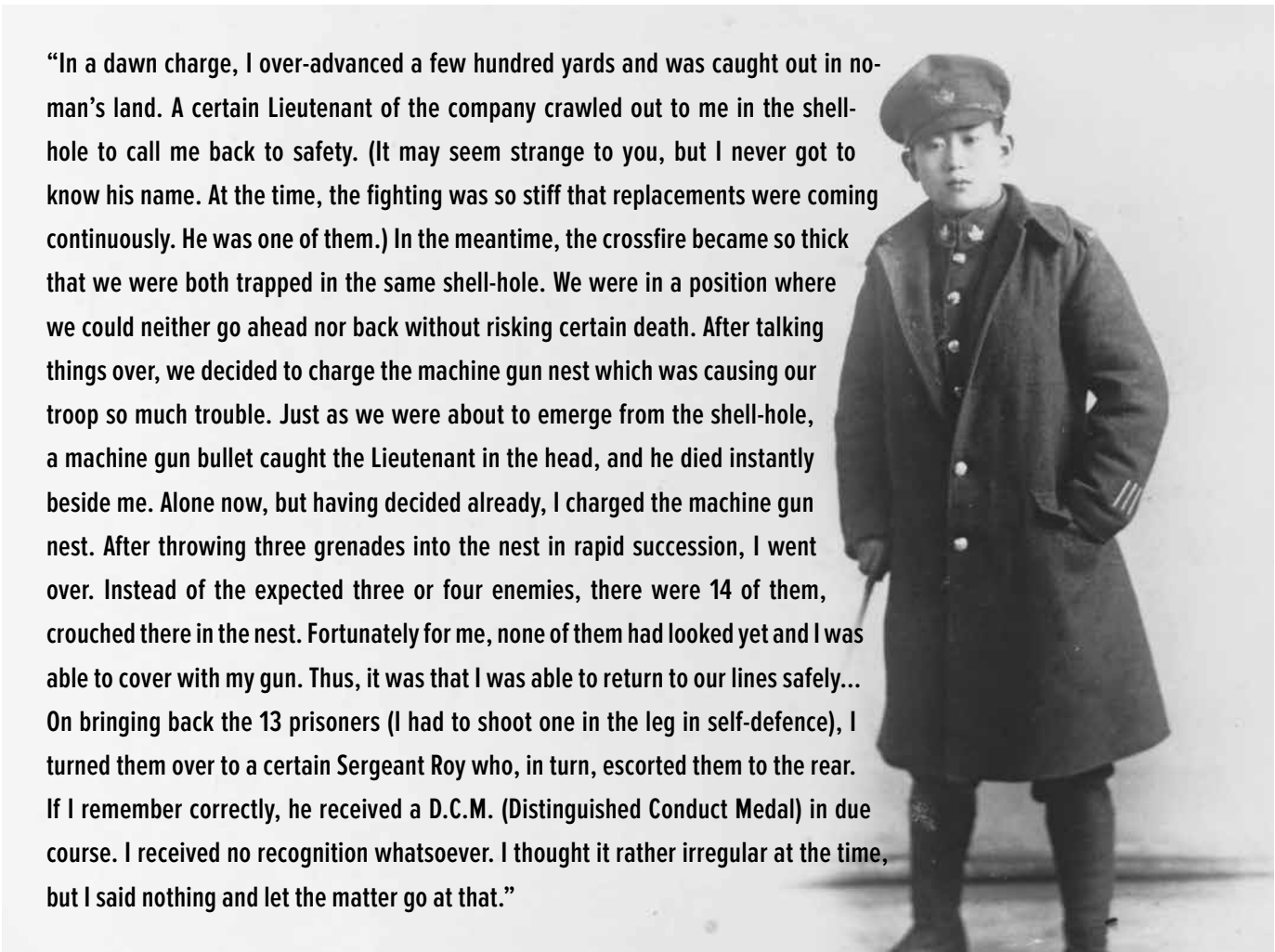
Seiichi Kinoshita passed away in June of 1961 after a long period of ill-health, undoubtedly much of which could be attributed to the many wounds he had suffered while serving in the Canadian army during the First World War. We do not know if Seiichi ever saw the 1951 letter from the office of the Soldier Settlement and Veterans’ Land Act. Indeed, there is no record of any of the six veterans actually getting their confiscated lands back. Moreover, even if Seiichi had seen the letter concerning his land in 1951, given his poor health, a young family of seven children, and little money; it is questionable that he would have been able to deal with the outstanding payments and taxes that would have had to be paid before recovering his land.

At the age of eighteen on May 8, 1916, Seiichi Kinoshita believed that he was doing the right thing when he enlisted, and he was eager to serve his country. He was severely wounded at least three times, and despite serving heroically, possibly even being overlooked for a medal or commendation, he persevered without complaint and was honourably discharged. He took advantage of a veterans’ program and purchased some farmland on which he hoped to provide for himself and his family. Despite an obviously unjust valuation, he persevered and even took advantage of the Canadian justice system to obtain a more just valuation. Then, as he was beginning to prosper, that land was taken away from him in 1942 because he was a Canadian of Japanese ancestry. He thought that his sacrifices as a veteran would entitle him to be treated



Commander's Commendation to Corporal Darren Kinoshita, Seiichi's Grandson, for service in Afghanistan. Courtesy of the Kinoshita Family

justly as a Canadian, but it didn't. In 1945, he believed in the system enough to make a difficult trip from the Tashme internment camp to Hope in order to exercise his franchise in the federal election. In 1947, although starting to lose faith, he made one last effort to obtain restitution of his land via the Bird Commission. It didn't happen. By 1951, it was probably too late. Seiichi Kinoshita had persevered as a soldier and had persevered to be accepted and fully recognized as a Canadian. He didn't live to see the Canadian government's apology for the wartime injustices or to receive any of the redress, but his wife and several of his children did. His family has ultimately prospered as Canadians and his grandson, Darren Kinoshita, received a military commendation for his service in Afghanistan<sup>21</sup>. It has taken much too long for Seiichi to be accorded the recognition he deserved. But thanks to his sacrifices, his descendants are able to enjoy the rights and privileges as Canadians that he was denied for so long. 🌸



Seiichi Kinoshita while recuperating from wounds in England, ca 1918. Courtesy of the Kinoshita Family

<sup>1</sup> 木下清一 is his correct name in Japanese. Under current romanization practice this is written as “Seiichi Kinoshita”. However, in many official documents in Canada, the first name has been written as “Seichi” or even “Sechi” as in this newspaper article.

<sup>2</sup> Vancouver Daily Province, July 12, 1945.

<sup>3</sup> 1898 is the date of birth on the official family register, but some family members believe it was 1897.

<sup>4</sup> Kaye Kishibe, “Battlefield At Last: The Japanese Canadian Volunteers of the First World War, 1914 – 1918”, Toronto, 2007, pp. 10 – 18.

<sup>5</sup> Telegram from the Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence to Yasushi Yamazaki, President of the Canadian Japanese Association, April 19, 1916.

<sup>6</sup> Ken Adachi, “The Enemy That Never Was”, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1976, pp. 102-103,

<sup>7</sup> Kay Kishibe, op.cit., p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Seiichi Kinoshita, Letter to Mr. R.A. Payne, Dec. 12, 1947. This letter was part of the files obtained through the Landscapes of Injustice project, NAJC, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Kay Kishibe, op.cit., pp. 26-27. In total nearly 200 Japanese Canadians enlisted in the Canadian Army in WWI.

<sup>10</sup> Military Personnel Files for Seichi [sic] Kinoshita, National Archives, Ottawa.

<sup>11</sup> Seiichi Kinoshita, op.cit. See also: Roy Ito, “We Went to War”, Canada’s Wings, Inc., Stittsville, 1984, p. 47

<sup>12</sup> Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan, ed. Jinshiro Nakayama, Tokyo, Japan Times 1921, p. 1199.

<sup>13</sup> Roy Ito, op.cit., p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Seiichi Kinoshita, op.cit.

<sup>15</sup> Seiichi Kinoshita, op.cit.

<sup>16</sup> Landscapes of Injustice, Seiichi Kinoshita Files.

<sup>17</sup> Seiichi Kinoshita, op.cit.

<sup>18</sup> Seiichi Kinoshita, op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> Seiichi Kinoshita, op.cit.

<sup>20</sup> Landscapes of Injustice, Seiichi Kinoshita Files, Letter from the Office of the Soldier Settlement and Veterans’ Land Act, Jan. 22, 1951.

<sup>21</sup> Commander, Canadian Special Operations Forces Command Commendation, awarded to Corporal D.T. Kinoshita, Dec. 20, 2011.

# “Gone but Not Forgotten”: My Family’s Story of Remembrance and Loss

by David R. Mitsui

Sgt. Masumi Mitsui and Masajiro Shishido of the 10th Battalion in uniform before departure, Vancouver 1916 NNM 2014-10-1-10



In 1942, approximately 21,000 Japanese Canadians were forcibly uprooted from the 100-mile zone of the West Coast of British Columbia by the Province of BC and the Government of Canada for “security reasons”, in response to the Japanese military bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941. This political decision was based upon ongoing systemic racism and discriminatory laws and policies against Asian immigrants. All personal property and possessions, including fishing boats, land, businesses, farms, and homes were confiscated and sold, with the proceeds used to fund their internment, beginning in 1942.

Masumi and Sugiko Mitsui and their children, Emiko Amy Kuwabara, Hideyo George (my dad), Sumiyo Lucy Ishii, and Hideharu Harry had worked tirelessly to operate their 17-acre poultry and vegetable farm in Port Coquitlam. The land was awarded to my grandfather Masumi Mitsui for being a veteran of WWI. Their home at 1945 Laurier Avenue, Port Coquitlam – which stands to this day – was built in the late 1920s by my grandfather. When the government took over the farm, in 1943 the Mitsui’s received \$2,291.47 minus

legal costs for transferring the title to the new owner. As well, a sales list of all of their family possessions, including farm tools and “Japanese fancy goods” accompanied the packed boxes which had been stored in the basement for “safekeeping”. The family’s possessions were purchased by Edward James Gilmore for \$893.70, shortly after they were uprooted. This latter amount was the total sum received by the family, and the sale of the farm proceeds were used to pay for their internment in Greenwood.



Sgt. Masumi Mitsui’s home at 1945 Laurier in Coquitlam, ca. 2011, courtesy of David Mitsui



Sgt. Mitsui in his legion beret, and comrade walking down Granville Street, Vancouver, BC ca. prewar NNM 2014-10-1-2

The Mitsui’s were told to make room down in the basement to lock up all their possessions. That is what was done before my grandfather was taken away by the RCMP on Christmas Day 1941, never to see his house or farm again. Unfortunately, most properties were ransacked and items stolen. His daughter Amy recalled, “I had a pretty doll that my father had given me from Japan; a hand-made doll, [with a] silk dress and everything and I had it in a glass case and [when I left] everything [had been] taken off and strewn all over the floor...even the head.” His daughter Lucy recounted, “All of my mother’s and dad’s possessions they treasured were gone. We left our best dishes, everything, hoping to go back and get [them]. The dishes we took were all cracked ones because we were taking them away ... nothing was left. We didn’t know where we were going. We all had to go to Hastings Park and we were put behind barbed wire fences there. Then we were all moved out to ghost towns. Tashme was one and Lemon Creek was

another. We went to Greenwood. We left my brother George to look after the [property] because the RCMP said the Security Commission would get someone within a week to look after the farm.”

My grandfather Masumi felt rage and he felt betrayed by the government. Years later, he stated, “I thought I was safe. I trusted them, at that time when they took me as an interpreter. I had an office right there by the RCMP and did the interpreting (for the Japanese Canadians brought in from the coast). I did not feel the government was going to treat me the way they did. I had complete confidence in the government that they wouldn’t be doing anything wrong to me because of being a veteran.” My grandfather was adamant that his WWI military experience, being awarded the Military Medal for Bravery, being President of Canadian Legion Branch #9, and in 1931, leading the contingent to lobby the BC Legislature for the right to vote for Japanese Canadians veterans of WWI would exonerate him from being uprooted.

My dad, George, had gone to Japan in 1938 to spend a year with his relatives. As a parting gift, they gave him his great-grandfather’s *tonto* samurai sword. My dad felt so proud and honoured to be entrusted with it. When told that the family would have to leave the farm, he buried his most valuable treasure on the farm with intentions of retrieving it after the war. My dad was moved to Strathmore, Alberta where he worked on a Canadian Pacific Railway cattle and horse farm and by 1944 he had moved to Toronto. He sent a telegram to his father in Greenwood that he was thinking of enlisting as a translator with the military intelligence services. Apparently his father was so angry about how he and his family were being treated that he replied by telegram, “If you join the Canadian Army after the way I have been treated, you are disowned!” My dad did not join. At some point after leaving Hastings Park and being sent to Greenwood, he retrieved the Mitsui samurai sword. A year before my dad passed away on August 11, 2011, he entrusted the sword to me.

On the day my grandfather had to report to the BC Security Commission (the civilian body entrusted with the forced uprooting) at Hastings Park, he was accompanied by his daughter Lucy. Lucy recalled, “The captain was sitting behind his big, long desk. He stood up and put out his hand, saying, ‘What can I do for you, Sarge?’ My father wouldn’t shake his hand.

He just pulled his medals out of his pocket and threw them on the desk. [he exclaimed], “What good are these?” They scattered all over the table and onto the floor. The captain picked them up and said, ‘This isn’t my doing, Sarge. I’ve got my orders from above.’” Lucy took the medals from the captain and later gave them to her father.

My grandfather’s medals continue to be a source of pride and remind us of the sacrifice, loss, bravery, and courage of our forefathers who fought for our freedom in WWI. His medals are a symbol of his character and his courage to face the perils of war and the ultimate sacrifice, but also the racism and hate he and his fellow Japanese Canadian soldiers experienced in the military. He and his family lost everything in Port Coquitlam: their farm, their livelihood, and their future life in British Columbia. But he never gave up hope for his family.

In 1983 my grandfather was contacted by a journalist with the *Hamilton Spectator* about his war service. That year he was made an honorary member of Hamilton Mountain Royal Canadian Legion Branch 163 and attended his first public Remembrance Day service since 1941. After WWII, he had not attended a public Remembrance Day service because of his loss of respect of the government and his feeling of betrayal towards the country that he fought to defend. However, he never forgot to honour the memory of his fallen comrades on Remembrance Day. He faithfully donned his uniform, his Legion beret, and shined his medals as he paid homage to them in the privacy of his home. His daughter Lucy remembered that on the anniversary of Vimy Ridge she saw tears rolling down his face.

My grandfather, one of the last two surviving Japanese Canadian veterans of WWI at the time, was invited to be the guest of honour at the re-dedication ceremony of the Japanese Canadian War Memorial in Stanley Park and re-light the eternal flame, which had been extinguished during WWII, atop the cenotaph on August 2, 1985. He was 97 years of age. After he laid the wreath he stood at attention, gave a final salute and said: “I’ve done my last duty to my comrades. They are gone but not forgotten.”

This indeed was his last duty. Sgt. Masumi Mitsui MM passed away on April 22, 1987, in his 100th year.

Prime Minister of Canada Brian Mulroney, and President of the National Association of Japanese Canadians Art Miki, signed the historic Redress Agreement on September 22, 1988. The agreement included symbolic, individual redress payments of \$21,000 for each living Japanese Canadian who had been expelled from the West Coast in 1942 or who was born before April 1, 1949. A community fund was created to undertake educational, social, and cultural activities or programs that contributed to healing or the promotion of human rights and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation was created. Citizenship was restored to those Japanese Canadians who had lost it through deportation or revocation. For my grandfather, the agreement came too late. He died having never received an apology from the government for being forcibly uprooted from his home or financial compensation for his dispossessed 17-acre poultry and vegetable farm in Port Coquitlam. His views of the government never changed but his respect for the military remained.

In August 2011, my grandfather’s house at 1945 Laurier Avenue, Port Coquitlam was on the market for sale. Asking price was \$749,000. It is identified as part of the Port Coquitlam Heritage Resource Inventory. At the time it was owned by a cabinetmaker who “restored it to its humble beginnings”. My wife Diane and I were planning to be in Port Coquitlam for Thanksgiving with our daughter and her husband that year when we came across the real estate ad. We arranged a private showing with the realtor that weekend. The realtor was quite excited about the house once owned by “a First World War Canadian War Hero”, which would be seen by one of his grandsons. He had even created a booklet of newspaper articles about my grandfather. The exterior of the house was not changed but the kitchen and bathrooms had been updated for modern living. The dirt floor of the basement had been cemented and many of the original main floor joists were exposed. As I wandered up the wooden stairs to the second floor I was amazed at the original tongue and groove wood panelling that covered the walls and ceilings. There were four bedrooms upstairs and I was left wondering who had slept in each. I don’t know where or when my grandfather had learned all of the construction skills required to build such an incredible craftsman-style house and even rebuild it after parts



A Studio Portrait of Sgt. Masumi Mitsui MM, Private Nagao, and Kazu Inouye, Vancouver BC ca. 1919 NNM 2014-10-1-3

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were destroyed in a fire in 1941. When my grandfather was awarded the property after WWI, the 17 acres were deemed not suitable for agricultural purposes with many acres of rock and sand down to the river. As I walked around the property, I was wondering where my dad would have buried the samurai sword. I could imagine my grandmother tending to her vegetable gardens. She had a green thumb and would have had many bountiful harvests. Even in Hamilton she had a vegetable garden behind their home at 490 York Street and would pick fresh produce for her home-made *udon* and stir fries. I recall that my dad told me they grew a lot of broccoli on the farm for chicken feed! My wife tried to convince me to buy the house but I was really reticent about owning it since we live in Edmonton, Alberta. My parents had driven across Canada (from Hamilton) to see the house a couple of times in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They never knocked on the door...they just took a few pictures and looked at it from the street. I am sure that my dad was feeling nostalgic as he would have had many memories of living there and perhaps asked himself, “What if?”. He remarked that the house had not changed in appearance, it looked the same as when the family left it in 1942, minus the surrounding land now occupied by upscale single family homes.

I personally do not feel the tremendous loss of the poultry and vegetable farm at 1945 Laurier Avenue, Port Coquitlam as experienced by my grandparents and their family, but I do have feelings of resentment that my family were forcibly uprooted and dispossessed of their property. I also feel angry and sad that the land awarded to my grandfather for his exemplary military service to Canada during WWI was taken away and deemed an insignificant and acceptable

outcome of fear, racism, and political expediency to have the “Japanese problem” go away. I feel immense pride and respect for the resilience of the *issei* and *nisei* to adapt to the racist political and social climate in Canada and their will to overcome and thrive and live prosperous lives in spite of these challenges and obstacles.

While I have vivid and fond memories of my grandparents while I was growing up, I have many regrets that I did not engage them more to learn about their family in Japan, as well as ask about my grandfather’s feelings when he left Japan in 1908, or his memories when he was President of Canadian Legion Branch #9 and lobbied the BC Legislators for the right to vote. My Grandfather never talked about the war or being forcibly relocated. And as with most *nisei*, my parents never talked about being uprooted or being interned until only recently. All I had from the late 1980s were a few newspaper articles which appeared around the time of his death, a couple of books which referenced his war experience, a few stories passed on to me from my dad and his sisters, and my grandfather’s WWI medals. In 2003, the Military Museums of Calgary invited me to unveil the display featuring the Japanese Canadians in WWI as part of the 10th Battalion Calgary Highlanders with a photo of my grandfather and his WWI medals as the centrepiece. In more recent years, I have to thank Lyle Dick, Parks Canada historian, who took an unprecedented interest in my grandfather’s life, and both father and son, Russ Crawford and Shaun Crawford, who became enthralled with my grandfather’s life experience and ended up writing a book (*Canadian Samurai*) and developing a screenplay for a movie (*Once the Sun Rises*), respectively. However, it is the seven year



Sgt. Masumi Mitsui Wearing a Canadian Legion blazer holding a photo of himself in uniform. Hamilton, Ontario, ca. 1980 NNM 2014-10-1-7

Landscapes of Injustice (LOI) research project, chaired by University of Victoria’s Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross and his team, that chronicled the breadth and vastness of the dispossession of property and forced uprooting of 21,000 Japanese Canadians by the government during WWII which affirmed the enormity of this tragic event. The LOI project has documented the incalculable loss and will keep these memories alive in perpetuity through the creation of museum exhibits, teacher resources, a digital database, and digital stories of survivors and family members.

It has been seventy-nine years since 21,000 Japanese Canadians were forcibly uprooted during WWII in British Columbia. Our beloved *issei* have passed away. Those *nisei* who were forcibly relocated and/or and interned, are in the twilight of their lives. Their wounds may have healed but the memories of racism and the scars of loss remain. The *sansei*, *yonsei* and *gosei* generations can only imagine what our lives would be like if our Japanese Canadian ancestors had not been forcibly exiled from British Columbia and their property dispossessed. Racism and discrimination continue to plague Canadian society. While forced uprooting and dispossession of property will likely not be repeated in Canada, we can only hope that our elected officials and every Canadian citizen continue to have the courage to stand up and work to eliminate systemic racism in our society. Our Japanese Canadian ancestors endured and suffered immensely for our citizenship and it is up to each of us to cherish and remember the price paid for our future. 🌸

# The Korean War in the Land of the Morning Calm

by Takao Irizawa

The Korean War was not unlike the American Civil War. It was a fratricidal battle with monumental casualties. Kim Il-sung, the then leader of North Korea, was determined to reunite the two Koreas into one country under his communistic rule. It was 71 years ago, on June 25, 1950, that the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) supported by Chinese and Russian materiel invaded South Korea in a surprise attack. Resistance was almost negligible and the North advanced to within Pusan (now known as Busan) in the south when General Douglas MacArthur made a remarkable strategic military maneuver with an amphibious landing with US Marines at Inchon, recapturing Seoul and cutting off the NKPA main supply route.

United Nations Forces initially made up of 16 NATO nations from around the world volunteered their military troops to stop the NKPA with the US sending the most military assistance. The US sent over 1,800,000 troops of which 3,500 were Japanese Americans. The Americans suffered 45,000 casualties (KIA) and the Japanese Americans suffered 247 casualties. Canada sent more than 26,000 troops and suffered 516 casualties.

The UN defending forces from Seoul and Pusan pushed the NKPA back north to the Yalu River bordering China. It appeared that the invasion was

repelled and the message given out was "we'll be home by Christmas." Not so fast, the Chinese People's Volunteer Army of 300,000 men entered the war in late 1950 and were forming up at Yalu to begin their offensive southward to Seoul. They got as far as Kapyong near Seoul. The UN Forces were able to stop their advance and it became a stalemated war for two years. It was during this time period that Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura, a Japanese American soldier, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his conspicuous gallantry and courage. The Americans had considered using the atomic bomb to end this war. Negotiations for an armistice were being conducted and continued from 1951 to 1953 which was finally agreed to and it ended the war on July 27, 1953. All UN forces signed the Armistice Agreement except for South Korea who are technically still at war.

So it appeared that nobody won the war and the original DMZ demarcation zone remains on high alert—it's so eerily quiet there that it is deafening. The most important outcome was that North and South Korea remain divided and communist rule did not reign supreme. South Korea arose like a phoenix into a sparkling new country and today it is a major economic world power.

69 years ago in December 1952, I found myself in Korea at Brigade Headquarters near Kaesong. I spent



Wedding Reception Banquet, Hiro, Japan, 1954. NNM 2019.32.1.2.77 Takao Irizawa Collection

six months under wartime conditions. I was issued a Browning 9mm Handgun and felt pretty powerful.

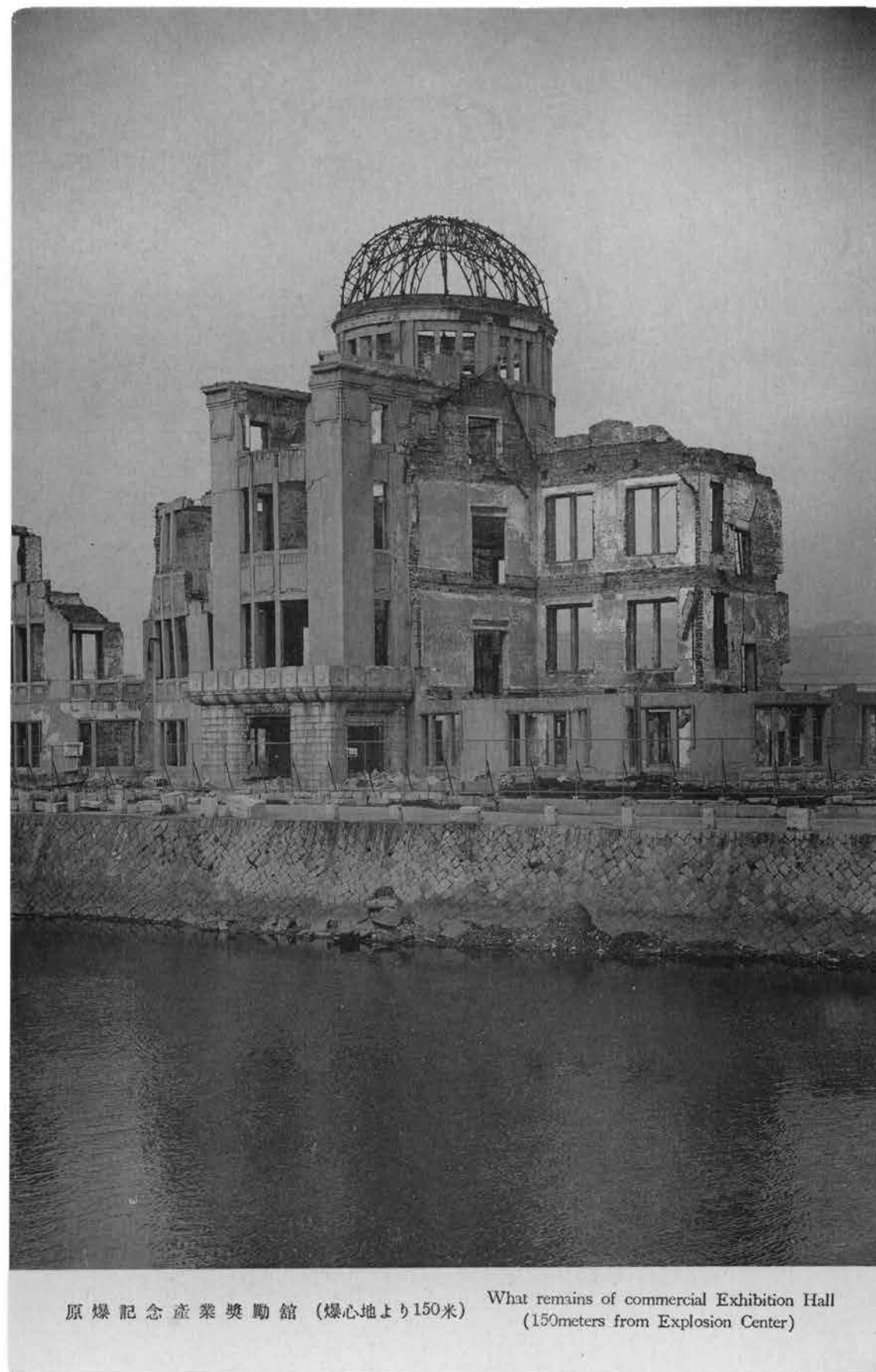
When the war ended in July 1953, I was fortunate to be posted to Hiro, near Hiroshima City for one year. I was able to visit my maternal Grandmother and members of her family. I even discovered the short cut way to make mochi from my uncle.

I met with many nisei soldiers in Japan and Korea. To name a few; Jimmy Nishihara, Yutaka Kobayashi, Art Sato, and Minoru Yamamura whose wedding I was invited to in Kure. It was quite different, we had to sit on the tatami at the reception, but the dinner was outstanding. I even met my brother Masahiro, in Sasebo where he was serving on the Canadian destroyer the H.M.C.S. Crusader. He took me to a sushi restaurant, and during that time period, the nigiri

was extra large and could be eaten in three bites. With rice still being rationed, how could they use so much?

One event had a profound effect on me. At Christmas time in 1953, a group of us travelled by jeep to Hiroshima City to donate used army clothing and blankets to the United Church. We then visited the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Dome, and even explored the interior. How one bomb could cause such massive utter destruction and death was mind boggling. Thankfully, none of my relatives living close by were affected by the bomb. I'm including two photos of me recording the visit.

The Korean War is all but forgotten, but on November 11 each year, it has been and continues to be remembered by many. To those who paid the supreme sacrifice in all wars, they will be remembered as we continue to live in peace. ★



The Commercial Exhibition Hall, Hiroshima, ca 1950. NNM 2019.32.1.2.11 Takao Irizawa Collection



Takao Irizawa in Front of the Hiroshima Industrial Promotion Hall, ca 1953. NNM 2019.32.1.2.73 Takao Irizawa Collection



Open House in the JCCA office on January 28, 1996, 511 East Broadway in Vancouver. The first JCNM&AS office was upstairs. From the left is Michael Wilson, Minnie Hattori & Dr. Wesley Fujiwara (JCNM&AS board member) NNM 2016-11-2-2-115

# The Birth of Nikkei Images: An Idea Becomes Reality

by Michael C. Wilson, First Executive Director,  
Japanese Canadian National Museum Project

The origin of *Nikkei Images* dates to 1994-1995, when the Japanese Canadian National Museum & Archives Society (JCNM&AS), under the visionary guidance of President Frank Kamiya, began to develop concrete plans for the museum itself. Initial funding for the project had been received from the Redress Fund, but what lay ahead were several daunting tasks for the Museum Committee. These included planning a physical museum and its displays, designing fund-raising campaigns that did not compete with other JC initiatives, formulating museum collection and display policies, hiring a core staff, recruiting volunteers,

liaising with other JC societies and associations, and above all documenting the lives and histories of the Canadian *Nikkei*. Perhaps the biggest challenge would be to know where to start.

An archivist (Shane Foster) was hired, and in late June 1995, applications were invited for the position of Executive Director. Several colleagues alerted me about this and I applied. In August I was offered the position.

The Museum Committee gave me a copy of the Japanese American National Museum's quarterly journal, and hoped that we could produce at least

a quarterly newsletter to inform members about our activities and plans. I eagerly agreed, because I already knew of the JANM's journal and had worked in museums in both Canada and the US – all of which had similar publications. But typically they were much more than newsletters, so I strongly supported the idea of a quarterly journal including informative articles.

A museum journal is central to the life of a museum, though now “journals” have often grown into multifaceted online resources including articles, museum news, blogs, and interactive pages. In 1995 the package was simpler, but still effective. A museum journal serves the key role of informing and involving the general public, capturing their interest and support whether or not they become museum society members. A newsletter tends to be ephemeral, thrown out when the news is out of date. A journal with articles would be a resource to be saved by subscribers, shared with friends, and held in libraries. Extra copies could be printed as complementary items to accompany museum displays at conferences, and to submit in support of applications for funding. They could be used in educational outreach programs for schools.

The journal needed a name, so I was asked to come up with a range of possible names for consideration including “Nikkei” in the title. Frank Kamiya had several suggestions and I added more, so on November 19 I faxed a list of 29 names for the committee and board to consider. My own secret favourite, “Nikkei Images,” was chosen.

Shane and I immediately investigated computer programs for formatting the journal, and in December we constructed the inaugural issue – in the midst of a whirlwind of other initiatives and meetings. The JCNM&AS invited Audrey Kobayashi to submit an article for this issue, entitled “A Brief History of the Canadian Nikkei,” accompanied by photographs hand-



Mike Wilson & Shane Foster, Archivist, at JCNMA Office - March 1996, sitting at the desk (built by Jiro Kamiya) in the upstairs office. Vancouver, B.C. NNM 2016-11-2-2-142



JCNM&AS President Frank Kamiya (on the right) cutting the cake at an opening event, Michael Wilson looking on. Vancouver ca. 1996. NNM 2016-11-2-3-19a

picked by Shane from the growing archival collection. In January 1996, Volume 1, No.1 of *Nikkei Images* was created. Its eight pages contain information and images that are still valuable for research today. Soon other contributions began to flow in, and the journal was on its way, a flagship for the museum and an enduring residence of memories.

We are often told that an image can become timeless. What makes it timeless is not simply its own content, rather the feeling comes from the audience's reaction. Long after an image is captured someone can rediscover it, relate to it, react to it, and make it part of themselves. *Nikkei Images* has reached the age of 25, but its contents will remain timeless. ★



# Treasures from the Vault



## Portrait of Kingo Matsumoto in Canadian WWI Uniform and Raincoat

by Mandy Choie

This is a portrait of Kingo Matsumoto, one of the nearly 200 Japanese Canadians who fought for Canada during World War I. In this photograph, Kingo is wearing a belted raincoat over his Canadian military uniform. Born in 1883 in Nagasaki, Japan, Kingo immigrated to British Columbia in 1903 to work as a fisherman. In 1916, Kingo was among 227 Japanese Canadian volunteers who attempted to enlist as a battalion in British Columbia without success.

In the days following Great Britain's declaration of war on Germany in August 1914, Japanese Canadians were agitating to be part of Canada's war effort. Yasushi Yamazaki, a prominent civil rights activist, president of the Canadian Japanese Association, and editor of the *Tairiku Nippo* (a Japanese-language daily newspaper), campaigned to allow Japanese Canadians into British Columbia's battalions and helped arrange military training for volunteers like Kingo. Driven by racism and fear that Japanese Canadians would demand enfranchisement, British Columbian politicians never granted official authorization to these Japanese Canadian volunteers. Prime Minister Robert Borden also refused this all-Japanese Canadian unit, but the men remained undeterred.

Although they were unable to enlist as a single battalion, Kingo and the volunteers were able to individually join Alberta's Canadian Expeditionary Force, which was desperate for more recruits. In June 1916, Kingo and 41 other Japanese Canadian volunteers joined the 13th Battalion Mounted Rifles of Medicine Hat, Alberta and later merged with the 52nd Battalion. Kingo was involved in eight of the ten battles that the Japanese Canadians fought in, and he was one of 13 men in charge of his unit's machine guns. He was wounded in battle and sent to Bramshot, England for treatment. In March 1919, Kingo returned to Canada via Halifax on the SS Cretic. By 1921, Kingo was living at 307 Powell Street in Vancouver; five years later, he was running a confectionery store two blocks away from his home.



Portrait of Kingo Matsumoto in Canadian WWI Uniform and Raincoat, ca 1916.  
NNM 2010.23.2.4.558 Canadian Centennial Project fonds

Despite having served in the Canadian military and gaining the right to vote as a Japanese Canadian veteran, Kingo was forcibly uprooted and sent to Bay Farm in Slocan Valley, BC with his wife Kente Kuniye Hirayu (Kunie) on September 1, 1942. After their internment, Kingo and Kunie returned to Vancouver and lived at 430 Cordova Street. In 1973, Kingo died from pulmonary edema that may have been caused by poison gas that he ingested during the war.

*Mandy Choie is a Collections Assistant at the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre. She previously served as a volunteer for the Museum, where she created metadata for custodian case files of forcibly uprooted and exiled Japanese Canadians as part of the "Landscapes of Injustice" project. She is pursuing a Master of Library and Information Studies degree at UBC.*