

'Congratulations on defeating us. I'm very sorry about letting many of your fellow prisoners die': Extraordinary letter by Japanese POW camp commander to save his own skin after WW2 is revealed

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He apologised that so many of them were not able to see the end of the war

Letter was seen as a desperate bid to avoid punishment for his war crimes

A grovelling letter written by the commander of a Japanese prisoner of war (POW) camp, in which he apologised for the suffering inflicted on captured soldiers, has emerged after 70 years.

Commandant Kazuma Fukuda read the letter out loud to 300 mostly-British soldiers on August 22, 1945, in a desperate bid to avoid punishment for his war crimes, a military historian has said.

He told the prisoners of Fukouka camp: 'I would like to extend my most sincere congratulations, but at the same time I sympathise most deeply with those who have been unable, due to illness or some other unfortunate reason, to greet this joyous day.

'I trust in your great understanding on this point.'

READ BY THE JAPANESE CAMP COMMANDER.

22.8.45. No.25 Camp,
Fukioka.
Japan.

I am pleased to inform you that we received Military Orders for stoppage of Warfare on August eighteenth.

Since you were interned in this Camp you have doubtless had to go through much trouble and gony due to the extension of your stay here as prisoners of war, but you have overcome them and the news that the day for which you longed day and night, the day on which you could return to your dear homeland where your beloved wives and children, parents, brothers and sisters, are eagerly awaiting you has become a fact is probably your supreme joy. I would like to extend to you my most sincere congratulations, but at the same time I sympathize most deeply with those who have been unable, due to illness or some other unfortunate reason, to greet this joyous day. By order we the Camp Staff have done all in our power towards your management and protection but owing to the destitute internal conditions have we regret that we were unable to do half of what we wanted to do for you, but I trust in your great understanding on this point.

Several days ago at one Camp the prisoners presented the Camp Staff and factory foreman with part of their valuable relief foodstuffs and personal belongings, while at other Camps prisoners have asked for permission to present civilian war sufferers with their personal belongings. This I know is an expression of your understanding open-hearted gentleness and we the Camp Staff are all deeply moved.

Until you are transferred over to Allied hands at a part to be designated later you will have to wait at this Camp. Therefore, I sincerely wish that you will wait quietly for the day when you can return to your homeland behaving according to Camp regulations, holding fast your pride and honour as people of a great nation and taking care of your health.

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By Jay Akbar For Mailonline

A grovelling letter written by the commander of a Japanese prisoner of war (POW) camp, in which he apologised for the suffering inflicted on captured soldiers, has emerged after 70 years.

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Kazuma Fukuda, the commandant of Fukouka camp, told 300 mostly-British prisoners of war that he was sorry that so many of their colleagues died.



He went on to claim his guards had done all they could to 'protect' the starving POWs, and that many of them died because of the Fukouka's 'destitute conditions'.

Fukuda added: 'Since you were interned in this camp, you have doubtless had to go through much trouble and agony due to the extension of your stay here as prisoners of war, but you have overcome them.

'The day on which you could return to your dear homeland where your beloved wives and children, parents, brothers and sisters, are eagerly awaiting you has become a fact.'

Finally, he told them their personal belongings would be returned to them and that they would have to wait at the camp until they were transferred back to the Allies.

The camp opened in September 1944 and housed almost 300 men, who were used as forced labour at a local coal mine.

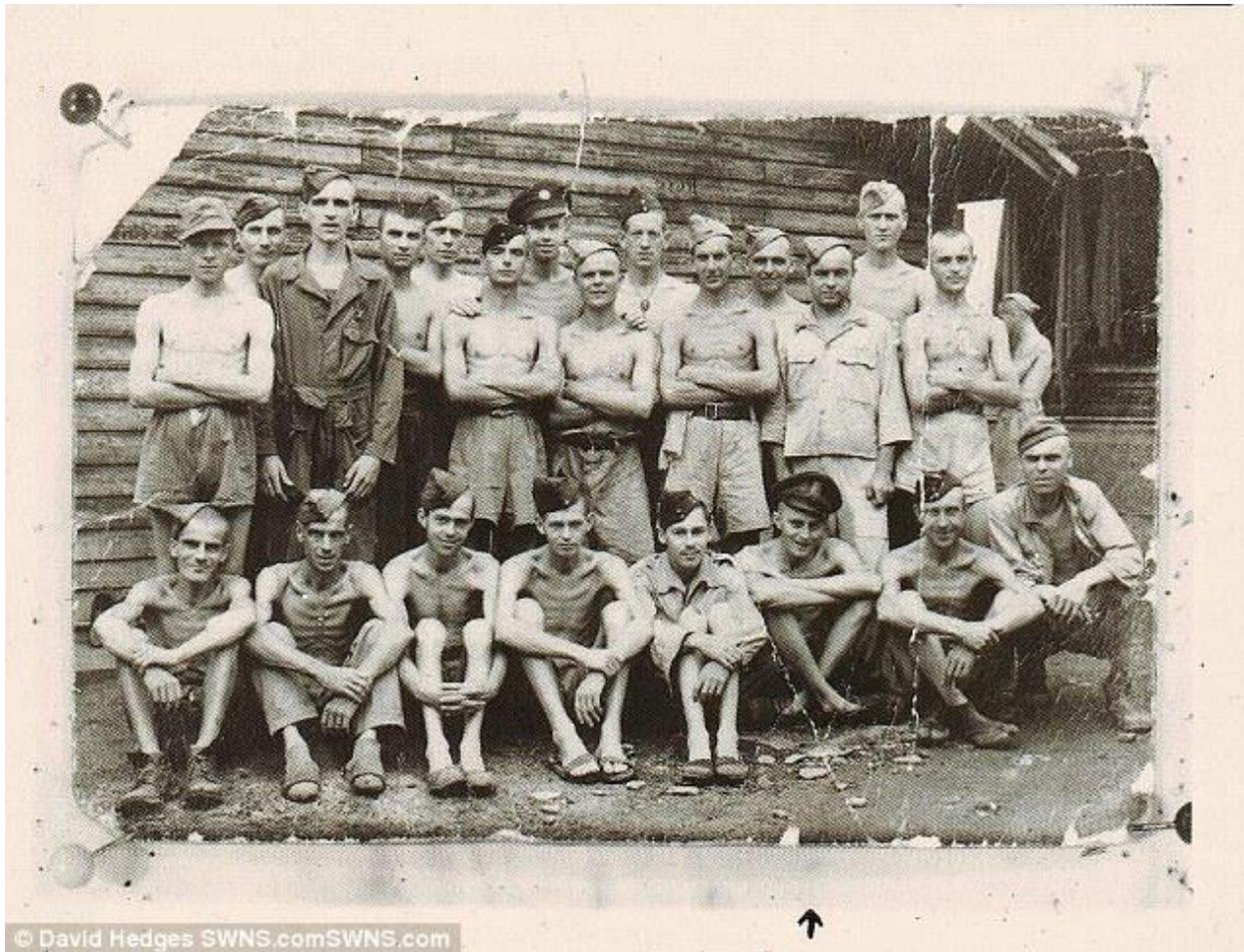
During the 11 months the camp was running, four POWs died from exposure and malnutrition. On one occasion, all of the prisoners were forced to kneel on the parade ground after a tap was broken.

During the war, Japan failed to follow Geneva Convention rules which governed the treatment of POWs. As a result, tens of thousands of Allied POWs were starved, tortured and used as forced labour.

Graham Lay, a military historian and Antiques Roadshow expert, said the commandant of the camp at Fukouka was a 'very worried' man judging by the statement.



Dangerous: Fukuoka camp was so close to Nagasaki that the prisoners would have heard the dropping of the second nuclear bomb on Japan in August 1945



Torturous: Most of the prisoners at Fukouka were British servicemen (file photo of British soldiers who were prisoners of war in Japan in the 40s) who were used as forced labour

He said: 'The Japanese set great store by honour and it was felt to be dishonourable to surrender instead of fighting to the end. That is one of the reasons why captured troops were not treated well.'

'In my opinion this statement was written by a very worried man, concerned that he and his camp staff would have retribution taken against them by the prisoners.'

'This was not uncommon and sometimes the camp staff would just disappear overnight leaving the PoWs on their own until the relief troops arrived.'

One of the POWs at Fukouka, Alistair Urquhart of the Gordon Highlanders, said the men were 'skin and bone' by the time the camp was liberated.

Mr Urquhart was forced to construct the Death Railway, a 415km-long track between Thailand and Burma built by Japan in 1943.

More than 60,000 POWs worked on the railway and more than 12,000 died during its construction.

After surviving the Death Railway, Mr Urquhart and a 'cargo' of prisoners were put on a Japan-bound 'hell ship' and endured illness, dehydration, and even cannibalism.

The ship was torpedoed and sunk by a US submarine which was unaware of their presence on the ship, but Mr Urquhart survived and was sent to Fukouka.

It was so close to Nagasaki that he and the prisoners would have heard the dropping of the second nuclear bomb on Japan in August 1945 - but were far enough away to avoid radiation poisoning.

A copy of the commandant's statement is now being sold by auctioneers Bonhams with a pre-sale estimate of £1,000 after being in the hands of a private collector for many years.

A spokesman for Bonhams said: 'The syrupy tone of this letter hints at the not unreasonable fear on the part of the commandant of Allied reprisals following the Japanese surrender.'

'Many of those who mistreated PoWs would face execution for war crimes at the post-war trials.'