

Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter

No. 17 HMAS *Kuttabul* and the Midget Submarines in Sydney – “We will remember them.”

19 June 2020

The 1st of June saw a major easing of COVID-19 restrictions in NSW with up to 50 people allowed to dine in at pubs and restaurants and intra-state travel permitted. Society is finally beginning to work towards a post-COVID reality.

In fact, the 1st of June is a very important day for Australia-Japan history. Seventy-eight years ago, in the evening of 31 May through to dawn of 1 June, Japanese Imperial Navy midget submarines attacked Sydney Harbour. On the Australian side, 21 sailors were killed, and 6 Japanese submariners also lost their lives.

In the morning of 1 June 2020, at the HMAS *Kuttabul* naval base on Sydney Harbour, a memorial service in honour of the Australian and Japanese victims was conducted, and I laid a wreath as the representative of the Japanese Government.

At the time of the attack, Australia and Japan were enemies at war, but post-war, our two countries developed friendly ties, and these days, we cooperate closely even in the area of security and defense. Participating in the memorial service, I felt the passage of time.

In this newsletter, I would like to describe the memorial service itself and invite you to reflect with me upon the Japanese Imperial Navy midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour, its history through to the present day and the significance of this.



**Memorial Service for the Sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul*
(1 June 2020, Royal Australian Navy)**

Due to the COVID-19 situation, the Memorial Service for the 1942 Sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul* was held on a smaller scale than usual. However, the sky smiled on the morning of 1 June, and among the attendees were Rear Admiral Jonathan Mead, Commander Australian Fleet, and Captain Matthew Shand, Commanding Officer HMAS *Kuttabul*, Royal Australian Navy (RAN), United States Consul-General Ms Sharon Hudson-Dean, and New Zealand Consul-General Mr Bill Dobbie.

During the ceremony, the ranks and names of the 19 Australian and 2 British sailors who were victims of the sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul*, a depot ship primarily used for accommodation, as well as the ranks and names of the 6 Japanese submariners who died in the three midget submarines, were read out one by one.

Then, Commander Mead and I laid wreaths at the memorial, and the Consuls-General of the United States and New Zealand as well as the Commanding Officer of the HMAS *Kuttabul* naval base also laid wreaths.



**The Last Post during the Memorial Service
for the Sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul*
(1 June 2020, Royal Australian Navy)**

The Ode was read, the Last Post was sounded, and a minute's silence was observed. The ceremony then concluded with the playing of the four national anthems, of Australia, Japan, the United States and New Zealand.

After the ceremony at the HMAS *Kuttabul* Memorial, we moved to the Heritage Centre located within the base, and Commander Mead and I laid wreaths at the base of the conning tower of the midget submarine (Matsuo (M-22) submarine) that is preserved and displayed there.

The history behind the attack tells us that on the evening of 31 May, the first of the three midget submarines to enter Sydney Harbour was the Chuma (M-27) submarine. It became entangled in the anti-submarine boom net at the mouth of the bay, and unable to move, the crew members blew up their own vessel.

The Ban (M-24) submarine was the next to enter. It fired two torpedoes at the United States cruiser USS *Chicago*, which was moored at Garden Island navy base. Both shots missed their target. One failed to explode; the other hit a sea

wall and exploded. This caused the sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul* which was being used for accommodation. Twenty-one Australian and British sailors were killed. After the attack, the M-24's whereabouts were unknown.

The final submarine to enter the harbour was the Matsuo (M-22) submarine, which was depth charged repeatedly by the Australian navy and sank in Taylors Bay. The Japanese crew shot themselves.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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**The Matsuo (M-22) submarine being raised at Taylors Bay
(June 1942, collection of the Australian War Memorial)**

After the fighting, the Chuma (M-27) submarine and the Matsuo (M-22) submarine were both recovered from the harbour, and the bodies of the four submariners were conveyed to the crematorium in Sydney's eastern suburbs. On 9 June, in the presence of Rear Admiral Muirhead-Gould, the naval officer in charge of Sydney, they were accorded a funeral with naval honours. The Australian national radio service recorded the proceedings and broadcast it to Japan.

In the second half of July, Rear Admiral Muirhead-Gould appeared on a national radio broadcast and explained his reasoning behind the decision to give the Japanese submariners a funeral with naval honours. He said that they were accorded the honour because they were patriots of the highest order and the courage they displayed was shared by the brave men of allies and enemies alike and was recognized and universally admired. This was also broadcast to Japan. The text is still preserved in the State Library of NSW.

In August, the ashes of the four men left Australia aboard an Australia-Japan diplomatic exchange ship and arrived at the Port of Yokohama in October. Upon their return to Japan, they were treated as heroes: in December, the four submariners received a KANJO certificate (a certificate to honour their service in battle) from the Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Forces Yamamoto Isoroku, and in April of the following year, a joint naval funeral was held for them in Kure.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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**The mother of Matsuo Keiu, Matsuo Matsue, receiving the SENNINBARI
from Mr W R Lancaster, Director, Australian War Memorial
(1 May 1968 at the Australian War Memorial)**

[SENNINBARI is a piece of cloth with 1,000 stitches collected by a family member and given to someone as a good-luck talisman, often worn as a belt]

In 1963, a SENNINBARI body belt on display at the Australian War Memorial was confirmed to have been discovered inside one of the midget submarines. Further research revealed that it had been found on the body of Lieutenant Matsuo Keiu, commander of the Matsuo (M-22) submarine.

When the Director of the Australian War Memorial, Major J.J. McGrath, travelled to Japan as a tourist in 1965, he went to visit the hometown of Matsuo Keiu, Yamaga City in Kumamoto Prefecture, and he met with his mother, Matsuo Matsue. In 1968, it was the turn of Mrs Matsuo to visit Australia. In Sydney, she visited Taylors Bay where her son's submarine had sunk and laid a wreath at the Cenotaph on Martin Place. In Canberra, she paid a courtesy call on Prime

Minister John Gorton, and at the Australian War Memorial, the new Director, Mr W.R. Lancaster, returned the SENNINBARI body belt to her. Despite the history of the attack on Sydney Harbour, Mrs Matsuo was warmly welcomed and this was widely reported in the media.

In 2002, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro gave a speech at a luncheon held at Parliament House in Canberra, and he expressed how he had been moved by the decision to accord the submariners a funeral with naval honours and return their ashes to Japan, and by the warm welcome Mrs Matsuo Matsue received from the then Australian prime minister and the people of Australia.



**The wreck of the M-24 on the ocean floor off Sydney
(NSW Department of the Environment homepage)**

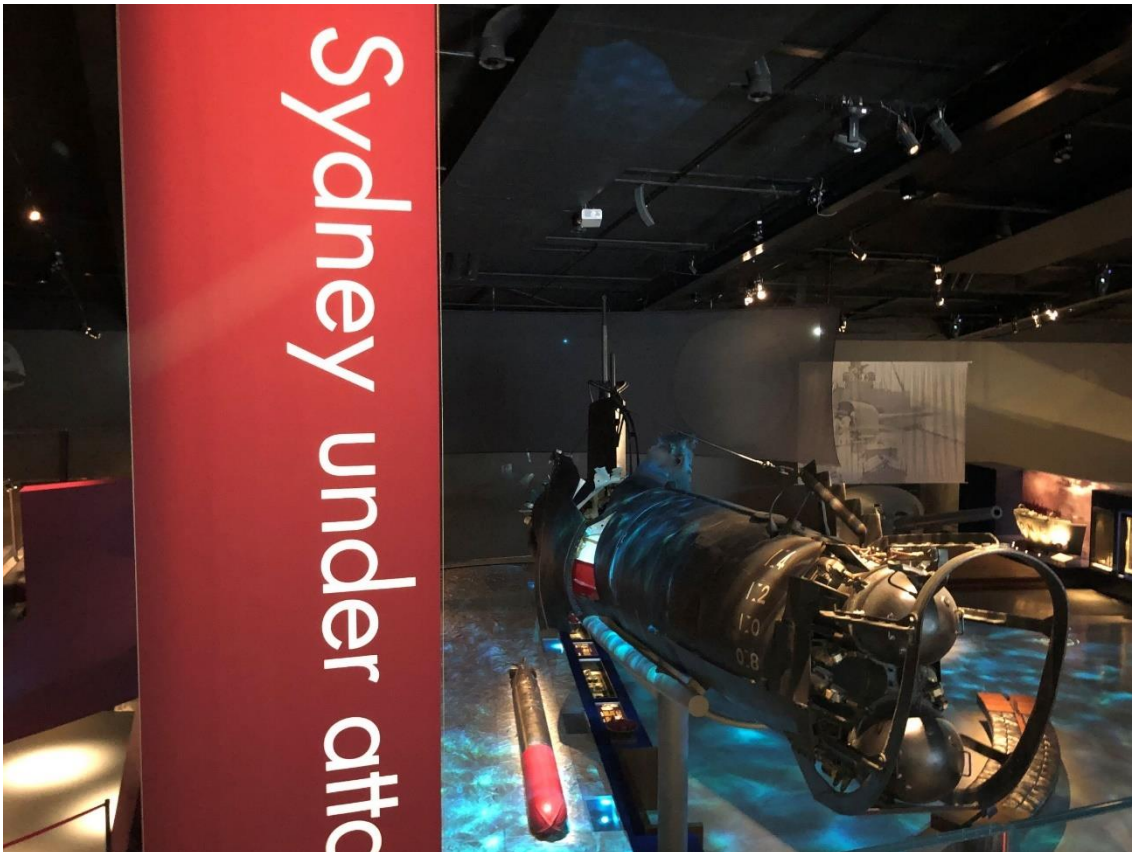
In November 2006, there was a new development. Amateur divers from Sydney discovered the missing Ban (M-24) submarine on the ocean floor some 20 kilometres north of Sydney Harbour.

In August 2007, 11 descendants of the crew, the Federal Minister for Veteran Affairs Bruce Billson, Chief of Navy Vice Admiral Russell Edward Shalders, Ambassador Ueda Hideaki, Consul-General Kawada Tsukasa and others gathered at HMAS *Kuttabul* naval base at Garden Island for a memorial service conducted by members of the Japan Maritime Self Defense Forces (JMSDF)

training squadron, followed by a memorial service at sea aboard the destroyer HMAS *Melbourne*.

On 17 May 2013, the 15th Iemoto (head) of Chado Urasenke (the Urasenke school of tea), Grand Master Sen Genshitsu, travelled on a coast guard vessel to the site of the M-24. There, observed by Ambassador Akimoto Yoshitaka, Consul-General Kohara Masahiro and others involved in Australia-Japan relations, he performed a special tea ceremony in memory of the war dead.

The Heritage Branch within the NSW Department of the Environment took active steps to survey and preserve the wreck of the M-24 as an underwater cultural heritage, and in 2009, these efforts were recognised by UNESCO with an award. On the NSW Department of Environment, Energy and Science website, there is an online exhibition relating to the M-24, including a 3D-model and images showing the M-24 resting on the seabed.



Display at the Australian War Memorial (11 November 2019)

Nowadays, a composite submarine constructed from the recovered Chuma (M-27) and Matsuo (M-22) vessels is on display at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, conveying the history of the time.

When I saw this display for myself in November last year, I realized that knowledge of this important incident that occurred between Australia and Japan is being passed on in such a visible way.

Today the midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour has become a link between Australia and Japan. Whenever a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Training Squadron vessel or the Japan Antarctic Research Expedition vessel, the icebreaker, *Shirase*, pays a port of call in Sydney, the commander of the vessel will always visit HMAS *Kuttabul* naval base and lay a wreath at the Kuttabul Memorial to pay respect to the Australian and Japanese victims of the attack, and at the same time, deepen exchange with the Royal Australian Navy.



Entrance to Sydney Harbour – morning (8 June 2020)

Seventy-eight years ago, war came to Sydney, and Australia and Japan both suffered losses with the sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul* and the midget submarines. Today, Australia and Japan are friends, and the two countries commemorate together the lives lost by both countries. This year also marks the 75th anniversary of the end of the war.

The victims can never be brought back. What we can do now is ensure that they are never forgotten, and through this act of remembrance, strengthen the bonds of friendship so that there are no new victims to mourn.

The efforts of Australian and Japanese stakeholders, over many years, have enabled the history of the midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour to be told. It is my hope that those of us now living in Sydney learn this history and pass it on to the next generation. I believe that, by doing so, we can further strengthen the ties between Australia and Japan, and create a base for cooperation across ever wider fields.

Article on the Memorial Service for the Sinking of HMAS Kuttabul (Navy Daily, 5 June 2020)

<https://news.navy.gov.au/en/Jun2020/events/5885#.XuxNHkX7Q2x>

Australia-Japan Research Project (Australian War Memorial)

<http://ajrp.awm.gov.au/ajrp/ajrp2.nsf/Web-Pages/HomePage>

Japanese Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour, Royal Australian Navy

<https://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/japanese-midget-submarine-attack-sydney-harbour>

Midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour, ANZAC Portal (Department of Veteran Affairs)

<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/world-war-ii-1939-1945/events/australia-under-attack-1940-1945/sydney-harbour>

Midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour, Australian National Maritime Museum

<https://www.sea.museum/2017/06/14/midget-submarine-attack-on-sydney-31-may-1-june-1942>

HMAS Kuttabul Memorial, Garden Island, NSW War Memorials Register

<https://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/content/hmas-kuttabul-memorial-garden-island>

RAN Heritage Centre

<https://www.navy.gov.au/ran-heritage-centre>

M-24 Midget Submarine online exhibition (NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment)

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/M24/index.htm>

Australia under Attack: Sydney and the Midget Submarines 1942, Department of Veteran Affairs, Canberra, 2000, Revised edition May 2007

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