

Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter
No. 55 Memorial Service for I-124 Crew Members

28 January 2022



**Laying a wreath at the memorial service for the crew members of the
I-124 submarine with NT Chief Minister Michael Gunner
(20 January 2022)**

In Australia, January is the time for summer holidays. How did you spend January? We must still be careful due to COVID-19, but I think normal life finally returned and many people went on family holidays.

As for me, I took a brief rest after the Japan-Australia virtual summit and then went on a business trip to Darwin. Ahead of the 80th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin on 19 February, the purpose of this trip was to attend a memorial service for the crew members of the Japanese I-124 submarine which sunk off the coast of Darwin on 20 January 80 years ago.



**Group photo of attendees at the memorial service for
the crew members of the I-124 submarine
(20 January 2022)**

- **The history of the I-124 submarine and the memorial service**

On 20 January 1942, the Imperial Japanese Navy I-124 submarine was on patrol and laying mines off the coast of Darwin. After being discovered by a Royal Australian Navy mine sweeper, the I-124 fought back by firing a torpedo which missed. The I-124 was then struck by depth charges from the mine sweeper and bombed by a US Navy plane, and it sank. Its resting place is 95km west-north-west of Darwin at a depth of about 50 metres.

All 80 crew members, including Commander (naval lieutenant colonel) Endo Takao and Captain (naval major) Kishigami Koichi of the 6th Submarine Squadron 9th Submarine, perished as a result. After the war, attempts were made to raise the submarine and inspections were carried out using unmanned submarines which confirmed the presence and position of the I-124. However, the remains of the crew members were left undisturbed in the submarine and it is protected as a war grave.

On the occasion of the 75th year since the Bombing of Darwin and the sinking of the I-124, the [Australian-Japanese Association of the Northern Territory \(AJANT\)](#) proposed the erection of [a memorial to the crew of the I-124](#) and received a grant

from the NT Government and the Australian Department of Defence. In February 2017, the unveiling ceremony for the memorial plaque took place at the NT Parliament House, and several months later, the memorial was erected in a park near the coast from where you can look out over the resting place of the I-124.

In November 2018, during his visit to Darwin, then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo visited the memorial and laid a wreath together with Chief Minister Gunner. Then, in February 2019, AJANT planted a 'healing plant' commemorative tree with the support of the NT Government.



Delivering [my remarks](#) at the memorial service for
the I-124 submarine crew members
(20 January 2022)

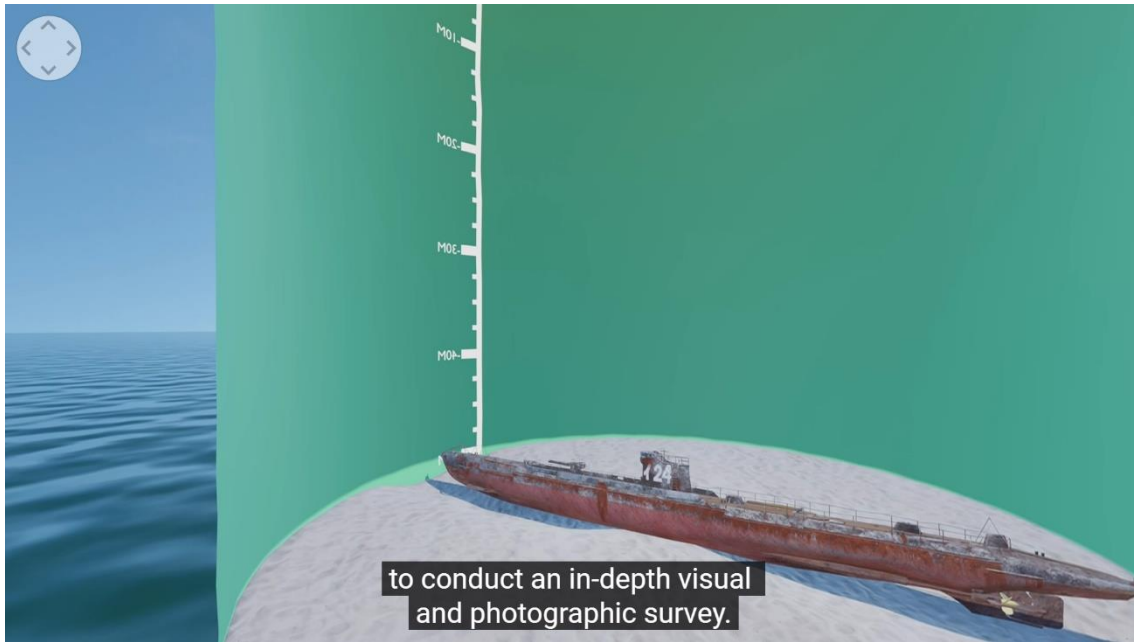
On 20 January 2022, 80 years after the sinking of the I-124, AJANT organised a memorial service which was attended by around 30 people. Among attendees were representatives of the Japanese and Australian governments, including the Hon. Michael Gunner MLA, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. Mr Chiba Shichiro, from the family of one of the fallen crew members, participated online.

In [my remarks](#) at the memorial service, I stated that the present Japan-Australia relationship and the peace and prosperity we enjoy today are built on the sacrifice of precious lives lost during World War II. I explained that since the war, Japan and Australia have walked together down the long road of reconciliation, exchange and cooperation to arrive at today's "Special Strategic Partnership". I also renewed my determination to realise a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and promote peace and prosperity for future generations.

In his remarks, Chief Minister Gunner paid his respects to the fallen submariners and said that it was only right to protect the place where the Japanese war dead rest in the sunken submarine.

Captain Aso Reona, Defense Attaché of the Embassy of Japan in Australia, was suddenly unable to attend as he was called away to assist with the dispatch of Japan Self-Defense Forces to Tonga. His speech was read out in his absence: in it, he announced that on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin in February, a ceremony will be held to unveil a stone monument with a plaque listing the names of the 80 crew members who perished in the I-124. This new stone monument has been jointly prepared by the Government of Japan, the NT Government and AJANT since last year.

Continues next page



Virtual dive [video](#) by the NT Heritage Branch
(Published on 20 January 2022)

- **Production of a virtual dive video**

In this the 80th year since the sinking of the I-124 submarine, the NT Government's Heritage Branch has launched a joint project with the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and Dr John McCarthy, a digital maritime archaeologist. A multi-beam sonar survey was conducted and the data was used together with diagrams and photographs of the submarine to create a virtual dive [video](#), as was recently announced in the [media release](#).

The virtual dive is a short 4.5-minute [video](#), so please be sure to take a look! Being under the sea, the I-124 is far away from us, but thanks to modern digital maritime archaeology, the submarine's current shape, and how it was at the time of the sinking, can now be visualised.

This project by Heritage NT makes history feel closer to us. I hope that it will help us understand the significance of this event and deepen understanding between Japan and Australia.



**With Chief Minister Gunner and Defense Attaché Aso from
the Japanese Embassy in Australia
(19 January 2022)**

● Meeting with NT Chief Minister Gunner

The day before the memorial service, I took the opportunity to meet with Chief Minister Gunner. It was our first meeting in almost a year since we last met in February last year.

Starting with the I-124 memorial service and next month's events for the 80th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin, the Chief Minister and I had enough time to exchange views across a wide range of fields on the progress of Japan-NT business since last year.

Thanks to the INPEX Ichthys LNG project in Darwin, Japan is the NT's largest export destination and accounts for 95% of the value of NT exports to Japan. That is why Japan and Australia cooperative efforts towards decarbonisation are essential. INPEX is actively promoting decarbonisation efforts such as hydrogen and carbon capture and storage (CCS) in Darwin. I hope that with the support of the Japanese and Australian governments this will lead to the development of a project that will symbolise a new era in Japan-Australia cooperation.

In addition to the above topics, we were able to confirm the latest information about business opportunities as well as the direction of future cooperation in areas such as prawn farming, undersea cables, critical minerals and tourism.



With Lord Mayor Kon Vatskalis and CLAIR Sydney Office Director Akaiwa Hiroto (21 January 2022)

● **Towards stronger cooperation with Darwin, the NT and Australia**

During this business trip, I also met with Darwin Lord Mayor Kon Vatskalis. Together with CLAIR Sydney Office Director Akaiwa Hiroto, the three of us discussed measures to strengthen future exchange and cooperation between Japan and Darwin. Drawing on its advantages of location and diversity, Darwin is engaging in sister-city and friendship-city exchange with a wide range of different cities.

I also had the opportunity to exchange views with Tourism NT about promoting tourism from Japan post-COVID. Also during my trip, I visited the Darwin Memorial Uniting Church, where I met online with members of the Fujita family, which owned Fujita Salvage, a company which removed wreckage from Darwin Harbour not very long after the end of WWII, contributing through this work to Japan-Australia reconciliation. At social gatherings, I also had the chance to talk at some length with representatives of AJANT and INPEX.

The I-124 memorial service was important in and of itself, but it was also a valuable opportunity to further deepen cooperative ties between Japan and the NT, and more broadly with Australia, while reflecting on our history.

I will visit Darwin again with Ambassador Yamagami for next month's 80th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin and plan to attend the unveiling of the new stone memorial with the names of the 80 crew members of the I-124 submarine. When attending commemorations such as these, I think of the contribution so many people have made to Japan-Australia relations up to this day and think of how I can promote such efforts in the future. Should you have the opportunity to travel to Darwin, I hope you will visit the two memorials to the I-124 and experience for yourselves how Japan-Australia ties have developed over the last 80 years.

Kiya Masahiko, Consul-General of Japan in Sydney

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