

A record of exchange as the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney (Edition 5) ~ ANZAC Day ~

28 April

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I think everyone living in Australia would know that 25 April is ANZAC Day.

Partly to review the facts for myself, here is a basic outline. ANZAC is an abbreviation of “Australia and New Zealand Army Corps”. When still a newly federated nation (1901), the Australian Army fought in World War I, and on 25 April 1915, together with the British Army and other forces, Australian troops took part in the landing at Gallipoli peninsula in the Ottoman Empire (Türkiye). During the landing and the subsequent battles, more than 8,000 Australians lost their lives and more than 18,000 were injured. The Gallipoli campaign is considered to have ended as a failure.

From this, 25 April came to be a national day to honour the courage and dedication of the troops who fought bravely and valiantly, as well as to remember the fallen. Memorial services are held throughout Australia on this day. Moreover, the day not only commemorates World War I; it also commemorates World War II and all Australian military personnel who fought and died overseas since then.

This year is the 110th anniversary of the Gallipoli landing and the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, and these two points were often the focus at the series of ANZAC Day related events that I attended. For this reason, I would like to reflect on the implications of ANZAC Day, including from the perspective of Japan-Australia relations.

Having assumed my post in October last year, this was my first ANZAC Day. What stood out to me at the outset was that it is not only on ANZAC Day itself, but also in the several days leading up to 25 April, that ceremonies are held around the country to commemorate Australian veterans. In fact, I was also invited to commemorations held on 22 and 24 April.

On 22 April, I attended a ceremony held at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway, which is located in Concord West about 20 minutes by car from the centre of Sydney. The memorial service honoured the battle of Australian soldiers who fought on the Kokoda Track (New Guinea Island) during World War II and reflected on the significance of that campaign, as well as commemorating soldiers who lost their lives in later conflicts, including the Vietnam War and the War in Afghanistan. Other than me, representatives of New Zealand, the US, the UK and Papua New Guinea were invited from the NSW consular corps, however, the Turkish representative was not invited on this occasion as this memorial service was focused on the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II.



At the memorial service on 24 April, a large special event space was set up in front of the Sydney Opera House, and the service was held to coincide with the sunset. It was a major event as evident by the participants, who included Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles and Leader of the Federal Opposition Peter Dutton, as well as NSW Deputy Premier Prue Car and Leader of the Opposition Mark Speakman, and former prime ministers, the Hon. John Howard, the Hon. Tony Abbott and the Hon. Scott Morrison. Members of the diplomatic corps were also present including His Excellency Ambassador SUZUKI Kazuhiro.

In addition to the Gallipoli campaign, a major focus of this memorial service were the attacks on the Australian mainland, beginning with the Bombing of Darwin in February 1942, and the sinking of HMAS Kuttabul by Japanese Imperial Navy midget submarines which took place in Sydney Harbour in May of the same year. There was also an explanation that despite it being a time of war, the Royal Australian Navy held a funeral service for the Japanese submariners who had blown up and gone down with their own vessels.

For both the Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of the largest opposition party to attend at such a busy time with only less than 10 days remaining before the federal election and to see them all shaking hands when greeting the guests of honour, it shows how ANZAC events overcome party lines and unite the Australian nation to commemorate the sacrifices of Australian service men and women. I was impressed by this deep-rooted tradition of reflection on the achievements of such sacrifices. The Japanese Ambassador was the only member of the diplomatic corps to be invited as a guest of honour and lay a wreath at this event, which made me feel that the ceremony was not only looking back at the past, but was also held to work toward a better future.



On ANZAC Day itself, I participated in the memorial service organised by RSL NSW, which was held at ANZAC Memorial in Hyde Park and at which the Governor of NSW delivered a speech. Together with other members of the NSW consular corps, I took part in the “Consular Star Ceremony”, also organised by RSL NSW at the ANZAC Memorial. Later, I also participated in the ceremony hosted by the Mayor of Woollahra Council where I live. The details of these ceremonies were covered in former Consul-General Tokuda’s [Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0](#), so I will omit the details, but I will say that Mayor Swan’s ceremony left a strong impression on me.

ANZAC Day this year fell in the middle of the election battle, but in addition to the current Independent federal member, major opposition candidates were also invited, and it was impressive to see how the whole community, no matter their political affiliation, came together to hold the memorial service. Furthermore, in her speech, the mayor said that the precious sacrifices made at the Gallipoli campaign through to the end of World War II protected not only Australia’s safety, but also the values of a liberal democracy. It was novel for me to see that this point of view is not only firmly shared at the federal and state level, but also at the local government level.



Attending this series of events, I felt that many Australians appear to understand the 30 years between the landing at Gallipoli and the end of World War II as being one major current (of course, it could be said that as the Consul-General of Japan, I am more likely to be invited to ceremonies with a focus on World War II). Much of the literature on Australian history says that the major reason Australian soldiers were dispatched to the Gallipoli campaign was due to the patriotism and loyalty felt towards the United Kingdom in Australia. However, it was perhaps not simply a matter of patriotism and loyalty; if one considers the circumstances that faced Australia at the time, there was an increasing threat from Germany and Japan, and there must have been an element of looking towards the UK as the only place Australia could seek security (as far as relations with Japan, matters must have been complicated by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance). Therefore, given this, the end of World War I meant the threat from Germany disappeared, and in order to counter Japan which had become its greatest threat, Australia relied on the UK. However, soon after the start of the war in the Pacific (during WWII), the UK's stronghold in Asia, Singapore, fell. Straight after Singapore fell, the Australian mainland was bombed for the first time at Darwin, and on top of that, Australia experienced the attack on a naval base in its economic centre, Sydney. Seen from a historical perspective, it seems that with the end of World War II Australia achieved a sense of security for the first time since its federation. Furthermore, I have frequently heard it said that the fundamental values of Australia are freedom and democracy and that these values have been protected by the precious sacrifices being commemorated by ANZAC Day.

I hear that for quite some time after the end of World War II, Japanese people were advised to stay at home on ANZAC Day because of the possibility that they would become the target of attacks. Despite this, thanks to the ceaseless efforts of many people, Japan and Australia achieved post-war reconciliation, Japan has become a liberal democracy, and it has become widely known among Australians that Japan is a country which shares fundamental values such as the rule of law. Today, Japan and Australia have realised a bilateral relationship which can be described as one of the best. Eighty years have passed since the end of World War II, and these days, at a time when the threat to liberal democracy and the rule of law is increasing, I feel that the week of ANZAC Day could be an important opportunity to reflect and consider what Japan and Australia can do to work together for a better future.