

A record of exchange as the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney (Edition 6)

～ Reflections around Sydney Harbour (HMAS *Kuttabul*) ～

25 June

[Translation published 30 June]

This June, there were two occasions which caused me to reflect upon the attack and sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul* by midget submarines of the former Japanese Imperial Navy which entered Sydney Harbour over the course of 31 May to 1 June in 1942. Here, I would like to present these reflections to you.

(Regarding the details of this incident, if you would like to know more, I would encourage you to read the good [summary](#) by my immediate predecessor Consul-General Tokuda.)

To begin, the first occasion was the memorial service held at North Head in Manly to which I was invited by Mr James Griffin MP, Member for Manly. A federal member of parliament, several state members of parliament and local high school students were among the many who participated in the event.

The speeches by the guests of honour and by a local high school students were heartfelt, remembering past tragedies and expressing their hope for peace in the future. In addition, the guest of honour, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales, brought a new discovery to me in her speech. Her Excellency delivers speeches at many and varied occasions, and frequently she delves deeply into the history of the particular ceremonies. This was another time that I learnt a lot by listening to her speech.

What I learnt was that the attack on 31 May 1942 was not simply a matter of the Japanese forces happening upon and aiming at the USS *Chicago* (which resulted in HMAS *Kuttabul* being sunk); rather the attack came after a reconnaissance flight by a Japanese navy float plane two days previously on 29 May. Before daybreak on the 29th, a float plane was released from the forward deck of the Japanese submarine I-21, and flying over Sydney Harbour, it spotted the USS *Chicago*. At one point, the aircraft flew as low as 30 metres and was able to look up at the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It was spotted by a search light, and while being tracked by an American aircraft, the Japanese float plane flew over North Head and tried to return to its mothership. However, due to bad conditions, the float plane hit the surface of the water and flipped over. Captain Ito and Airman Iwasaki were thrown out of the aircraft and were rescued by their fellow crew of the I-21. I was particularly impressed by the Governor saying that the reconnaissance flight demonstrated strategic planning and skill, and that these days, Australia and Japan “combine to use our mutual skill, intelligence and planning for a better world for both our countries”, as well as by the way she said that now we remember the bravery of all those, including the two Japanese float plane crew, who were involved in the attack on Sydney Harbour without dividing into friend and foe.

Both Mr Griffin, the organizer, and Her Excellency Governor Beazley, the guest of honour, noted that I was present to lay flowers. I reflected that the ceremony is not only a way to remember the past, but also to reinforce Japan-Australia reconciliation and reaffirm our ties of friendship as we face the future.



The other event I'd like to introduce is the port call by the Japan Coast Guard Training Vessel *Itsukushima*.

The *Itsukushima*, which called at Sydney on 14 June, is a state-of-the-art training vessel which was commissioned in July last year and carries approximately 50 trainee coast guard cadets. This is the first overseas voyage for the cadets, who had travelled to the US and the Marshall Islands before arriving in Sydney ahead of continuing on to India and Singapore. Commanding Officer Captain Mizoguchi spoke about how the world's coast guard organisations are collaborating and working to maintain law and order and maritime safety, and I believe that the *Itsukushima's* port call was a particularly fitting way to convey Japan's commitment to striving for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

On 16 June, Captain Mizoguchi and I co-hosted a reception inviting NSW parliamentarians, federal government officials, members of the Sydney consular corps, and representatives of the Japanese community. Approximately 100 guests were welcomed onboard. In addition to the food prepared by the crew, guests were treated to kendo demonstrations by volunteer cadets as well as *mochi-tsuki* and calligraphy performances. The event was a great success.

In their speeches, Australian dignitaries including NSW Industry and Trade Minister Anoulack Chanthivong who represented NSW Premier Minns, and NSW Legislative Council President Ben Franklin noted that the port call by *Itsukushima* was symbolic of today's excellent bilateral relationship and reaffirms the importance of Japan and Australia working together with other countries in the region to ensure maritime safety in the Indo-Pacific.

In my comments at the close of the reception, I remarked if one reflects that the *Itsukushima* was docked for its port call at the site of the attack by the former Japanese Imperial Navy on HMAS *Kuttabul*, then there was hardly a more fitting place to speak about maritime safety in the Indo-Pacific. I also noted the efforts of those people who came before us to achieve Japan-Australia reconciliation which has led to today's close Japan-Australia relationship, a relationship we call a Special Strategic Partnership.

Perhaps reflecting the good work that the cadets are putting in every day, the reception was blessed with fine weather, but the deck on the winter's night was a little cold. I think that there were some guests who warmed themselves with Japanese sake! I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those attended the reception on the *Itsukushima*.

