

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 12

~ ANZAC Day ~

26 April

(Translation published 28 April)

The 25th of April is ANZAC Day. On 25 April 1915, during the First World War, Australian and New Zealand combined forces (ANZAC) attempted to land on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Türkiye and many soldiers died. It is said that more than 8,000 people lost their lives and more than 18,000 were injured.

On ANZAC Day, all around Australia, events are held to pay respect to their meritorious actions, to mourn the victims and to honour the bravery, patriotism and sacrifice of the soldiers who courageously endeavoured to carry out their difficult mission. It is a national public holiday to reflect on past times of crisis and to think ahead to the future as a nation. It is not only the victims of the First World War who are mourned on ANZAC Day – Australians who served and died during the Second World War and during subsequent conflicts and UN peace-keeping operations are also remembered.

Perhaps it can be said to be the equivalent of 15 August in Japan.

The Gallipoli landing campaign resulted in many casualties and it is overwhelmingly evaluated as a “failure”. Speaking at the ANZAC Memorial this year, Governor Beazley referred to it as a “military disaster”. Australia was on the winning side of both the First and Second World Wars. Despite this, Australia does not commemorate a “Victory Day” but has the day of a failed military campaign as a national holiday; as a beginner when it comes to matters Australian, I thought this fact very strange. (By the way, where I once served, Russia, marks the 9th of May as “Victory Against Germany Day”, and it is the most important of its national days with a grand military parade attended by dignitaries including the president.)

I now understand that ANZAC Day is a very meaningful day. Over time, the Gallipoli campaign came to be considered (1) a formative experience for the development of the identity of “Australian troops and soldiers” in a nation which had only recently federated in 1901, (2) an opportunity to strengthen unity, independence and uniqueness as a nation, and (3) by marking its anniversary, a chance to step into the future as a nation while honouring the sacrifice of those who gave their lives for their country.

The above is by way of introduction.

On 25 April, I participated in three events.

Having arrived here last September, this was my first ANZAC Day.

One was the Commemoration Service hosted by RSL NSW. Held at the ANZAC Memorial in Hyde Park, it is the largest event on the day in NSW and many dignitaries attend and give speeches including the Governor. Members of the public also gathered in Hyde Park and listened to the Governor’s speech. I saw many students also taking part, among them, Scots College.



The second event, also hosted by RSL NSW, was a ceremony arranged for the local consular corps. Called the “Consular Star Ceremony”, every participant received a star-shaped piece of paper with the name of an Australian soldier who had a connection with the participant’s country. Participants threw their star into the “Well of Contemplation” inside the memorial as part of the ceremony. I received a star with the name of Sir Esler DENING, who was born in Tokyo and studied many languages. He later fought on the front line in France during the First World War as a member of the Australian Army. After leaving the army, he became the first “British” Ambassador in Japan after the Second World War. Above the well, there are 12,000 small gold stars embedded in the ceiling. Each of these stars represents the people from NSW who served during the First World War. The paper stars are cremated and it was explained the ashes would be scattered on the occasion of memorial services on battlefields.



The third event I attended was organised by the mayor of Woollahra Council, where I live. Many local veterans and their families participated. The ceremony was solemn, but at the same time, it had the peaceful feeling of a family event. My name and position were introduced during the ceremony and I was also given the opportunity to lay a wreath. After the ceremony, many local people came up to me and thanked me for taking part, and we chatted among ourselves.



If we look back at Japan and Australia's past, our countries were enemies during the Second World War. As then Prime Minister ABE Shinzo stated in 2014 during his address to the Australian Parliament, there is painful history such as the Battle of Kokoda and the Sandakan "Death Marches". Previously, one of the most important tasks of the Ambassador of Japan to Australia was "reconciliation". I have heard that there was even a time when Japanese nationals were advised to stay at home on ANZAC Day because of the possibility of being attacked.

Despite this, due to the untiring efforts of many people who came before us, Japan and Australia achieved post-war reconciliation, and today our bilateral relationship is at its best.

Now I am invited in my capacity as the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney to lay a wreath on ANZAC Day and my participation is welcomed by local people. This is not something to be taken for granted. I realised anew that this is the fruit of the untiring efforts of our predecessors who strove to achieve Japan-Australia reconciliation. On ANZAC Day, I made my way home filled with gratitude for all those who built the foundations of Japan and Australia's post-war relationship.

(Ends)