

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 14

~ Commemoration services for the attack on Sydney Harbour ~

5 June

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On the 1st and 2nd of June, I attended memorial services commemorating the attack on Sydney Harbour.

The service on 1 June was organised by the Royal Australian Navy, and the one on 2 June was an initiative of a member of the NSW Parliament.

I begin by sharing what made the deepest impression on me on both days. At each service, I was approached by many older veterans, who not only chatted with me, they also asked if they could take a photo with me and thanked me for attending the service as the Consul-General of Japan. Since arriving in Sydney, I can't remember an event where I was asked so many times to be in photos. Japan and Australia once fought each other as enemies in a world war; however, attending these events and feeling the warm welcome and the spirit of reconciliation, I was truly thankful and renewed my deep respect to those who came before us and whose efforts achieved this.



From 31 May to 1 June 1942, three Imperial Japanese Navy midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour to attack. HMAS *Kuttabul* was sunk, resulting in 21 victims – 19 Australian soldiers and 2 British soldiers. All crewmen on the midget submarines also died in the attack. HMAS *Kuttabul*, which was torpedoed, was a dormitory, and it is said that the midget submarine's initial target was the US destroyer USS *Chicago*, which was moored next to the *Kuttabul*. The midget submarine,

which carried out the attack, left the harbour, and its whereabouts were unknown for a long time, until 2006, when it was found lying on the sea floor off the coast of Sydney Harbour. Regarding the other two midget submarines, one blew itself up after it became caught in a boom net when entering the harbour, and it is recorded that the other midget submarine was hit by the Royal Australian Navy and its crew committed suicide in the sunken vessel. These two vessels were raised by the Royal Australian Navy, and very soon afterwards, a generous funeral was organised for the Japanese crew. Not only that: when Mrs Matsuo Matsue, the mother of the commander of the second midget submarine, Lieutenant Matsuo, visited Australia in 1968, the Royal Australian Navy returned a personal item, his SENNINBARI¹, to her.

The warmth of the Royal Australian Navy's reception of Mrs Matsuo is documented as having had a significant impact in both Japan and Australia. During his 2002 visit to Australia, then Japanese Prime Minister KOIZUMI Junichiro referred to this event during his speech at a lunch held at Parliament House in Canberra and he expressed his admiration and profound gratitude. It is a little long, but let me quote from his speech.

[The following is quoted from the Australian War Museum website.]

Prime Minister Koizumi: "About sixty years ago, Japanese midget submarines entered into Sydney Harbour to carry out an attack. Some of the crew were caught by the Australian Navy. In general, those combatants would be treated with hatred and hostility in most countries.

"After this luncheon, I am going to visit the war museum in Canberra because I heard the submarine is still exhibited there. I would like to view the submarine.

"At that time, a Naval Admiral and the Royal Australian Navy treated the enemy sailors not with contempt and hostility but with civility as brave men. A funeral was carried out at that time, according to the highest level of naval tradition. Then the remains were returned to Japan. About twenty years later, a mother of one of the crew visited Australia to thank the Australians for their treatment of the dead crewmen and to commemorate her son's death. At that time, the Australian people and Prime Minister Gorton welcomed her warmly in saying that "the mother of the brave man has come". I do not know who were the people who expressed civility and generosity at such a level to the enemy soldiers.

"The past is very important. We cannot forget the past. However, the relationship between Australia and Japan has demonstrated the importance of overcoming past troubles and difficulties, and building friendly relationships for the future."

¹ 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.



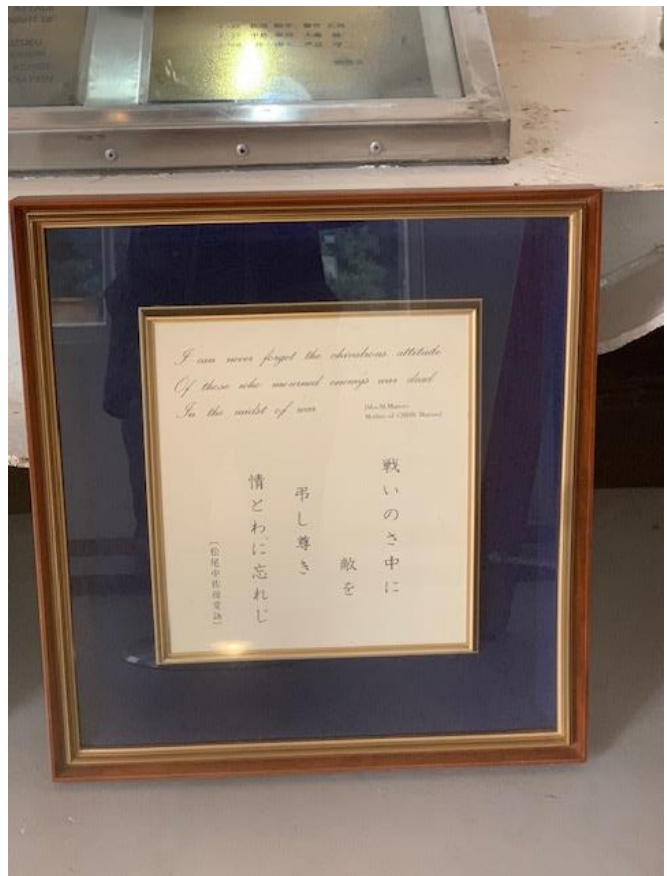
On 1 June, the Commemoration Service was held at HMAS *Kuttabul* naval base on Garden Island.

At the Navy Heritage Centre located within the base, a poem written by the mother of Lieutenant Matsuo and a letter she wrote expressing her sincere thanks to the Royal Australian Navy are carefully preserved together with a part of one of the midget submarines. Mrs Matsuo's poem reads: "I can never forget the chivalrous attitude | Of those who mourned enemy's war dead | In the midst of war."

I think that Prime Minister Koizumi shared the same feeling of gratitude and respect as conveyed in her poem.

Even today, many visitors from Japan visit the *Kuttabul* base, and the war dead of both Japan and Australia are mourned there.

At the memorial service, the Commander of the Australian Fleet and I lined up together to lay our wreaths. Floral tributes were made at two locations on the base: inside the Navy Heritage Centre and at the memorial itself. The war dead of both countries were mourned. The names and ranks of the Australian and British soldiers who perished in the attack were read out one by one by a representative of the Royal Australian Navy, and the names and ranks of the fallen Japanese submariners were read out by students from the Sydney Japanese International School. The national anthems of both Japan and Australia were sung.



On 2 June, I attended the Commemorative Service at North Head, which is organised by the member for Manly, Mr James Griffin MP. Commodore Raymond Leggatt, AM, CSC, RAN, representing the Chief of Navy, gave a speech as the guest speaker, and the event was attended by many veterans and their families as well as local high school students. The heartfelt speech by the student representative emphasised the wish for peace for the future as well as passing on memories.



I reiterate my profound respect for the efforts of Japanese and Australians who proceed us and whose efforts brought us to this point. Among them are individuals who have made significant contributions such as Mr Fujita of Fujita Salvage, who I wrote about in the fourth edition of my newsletter, and the Glynn Brothers – Fr Paul and the late Fr Tony – who I introduced in the fifth edition.

I understand that there used to be a time when the Japanese community was warned not to go out on ANZAC Day. This was to avoid any Japanese national being involved in an incident arising from lingering hostility towards Japan as a former enemy.

Reflecting on this history, these memorial services are all the more moving. They leave a deep impression of the Japan-Australia reconciliation that was achieved, the excellent cooperative relationship that then developed, and the vows of friendship that take us into the future – these events will remain in my heart. I was so happy when many veterans asked me to take photos with them. The strength of friendship that Japan and Australia now share is a gift born of the efforts of those who came before us.

I would like to take their efforts on board and pass them on to the next generation, and to play my part, no matter how small, in developing Japan-Australia friendship.

(Ends)