

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 10

~ Return to Darwin : Commemorative Service of Darwin Bombing and Submarine I-124~

26 February

(Translation published 08 March)

From 18 to 20 February, I visited Darwin again. It was my second time; I first visited in November last year.

On 19 February, I attended the Bombing of Darwin Commemorative Service, which is hosted by the Lord Mayor of Darwin, and the Commemorative Service for the Sinking of USS Peary, which was organised by the Australian American Association of the Northern Territory. I also attended a reception hosted by NT Chief Minister Natasha Fyles and held individual meetings with Territory officials.

At the Bombing of Darwin Commemorative Service, a siren sounded and volleys were fired at 9.58am, the time that the aerial bombing began. Two fighter planes also flew overhead. Eight-one years ago, more than 200 people died in the Bombing of Darwin by Imperial Japanese Forces on 19 February 1942. As the first large-scale attack on the Australian mainland, the day is deeply etched in Australian history.

The previous day, 18 February, a memorial service for the I-124 submarine crew was held, organised by the Australian-Japanese Association of the Northern Territory (AJANT). On 20 January 1942, the I-124 was sunk off the coast of Darwin when Australian and US allied forces returned fire; all 80 crew on board the I-124 were killed. To this day, the crews' remains rest inside the vessel.

When I visited Darwin in November last year, NT Heritage Branch explained to me about their plans to film the I-124 in 3D. During the course of filming operations, a representative of the Heritage Branch took the special step of gathering sand from the sea bed where the I-124 lies.

On this occasion, Mr Chiba, who is a member of the family of one of the deceased I-124 crew, came to Darwin from Japan, and during the memorial service he received some of this sand. Some of the sand has been buried in front of the physical memorial and some is being kept by AJANT. After some of the sand is taken back to Japan and given to families of the crew, the sand will be dedicated at the military cemetery at Kure City in Hiroshima Prefecture and at Togo Shrine in Shibuya, Tokyo. The sand will be treated in the same way as if it were the remains of the deceased. His Honour Professor the Honourable Hugh Heggie PSM, Administrator of the Northern Territory since January, also attended the I-124 memorial service. The event and its background were widely covered in the local media, on TV and in the press.

In my speeches, I acknowledged that it was the result of the unceasing efforts of our predecessors that Japan and Australia have achieved reconciliation and a relationship built on layers of exchange and cooperation, and that today Japan and Australia, together with the United States, are strengthening our ties and our shared desire to work for the peace and security of the region and the world. When I had opportunity to pay an individual courtesy call on Administrator Heggie, I expressed my profound gratitude for the reconciliation efforts of NT Government officials.

Japan and the Northern Territory have strong trade and economic ties, including the large-scale investment in LNG by INPEX. It is anticipated that there will be ever greater opportunities for defence exchange and security cooperation going forward. Eighty-one years after the Bombing of Darwin and the sinking of the I-124, my visit made me deeply aware of the important place that the Northern Territory and its capital and largest city, Darwin, have in the history between Japan and Australia to this day.

(Captain Amanuma, Defence Attaché at the Japanese Embassy in Canberra, accompanied me on this visit.)



Mr Chiba receiving the sand from an AJANT representative

Gesture of peace marks war tragedy



Ruth Jones, Administrator of the Northern Territory Professor Hugh Heggie PSM, Mariko Tokuda, and Consul-General of Japan Shuichi Tokuda attended the I-124 submarine memorial. Picture: Sierra Haigh

SIERRA HAIGH

TERRITORIALS have gathered at the Dripstone Cliffs to commemorate the 81st anniversary of a World War II wreck.

The Imperial Japanese Navy I-124 submarine sank in 1942 with 80 crew members on board, and was the first wreck in Australia to be protected under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976.

Australian-Japanese Association of the NT president

"With a passive time, you realise that with our common humanity, we need to work towards a journey of peace and reconciliation."

AUSTRALIAN-JAPANESE ASSOCIATION OF THE NT PRESIDENT KATHLEEN BRESNEHAN

Kathleen Bresnehan said it was important to remember each aspect of the Territory's history.

"As time has progressed, we realise that conflicts have happened in the past, and

war," she said. "With a passive time, you realise that with our common humanity, we need to work towards a journey of peace and reconciliation."

Reflecting on the war history of Australia and Japan,

Consul-General of Japan Shuichi Tokuda said both countries had roles to play in reconciliation and cooperation.

"Today, Japan and Australia are working together with other like-minded nations for peace and prosperity," he said.

"On this day, let us remember and renew our determination for this course."

In an effort to offer the fallen submariners' families closure, archaeological divers retrieved a container of sand

from the wreck site in November 2022, that was later delivered to Japan.

Some of the sand was spread at the site of a memorial plaque at the Casuarina Coastal Reserve - alongside a wreath - on Saturday night.

Guests were also invited to make offerings of flowers and incense.

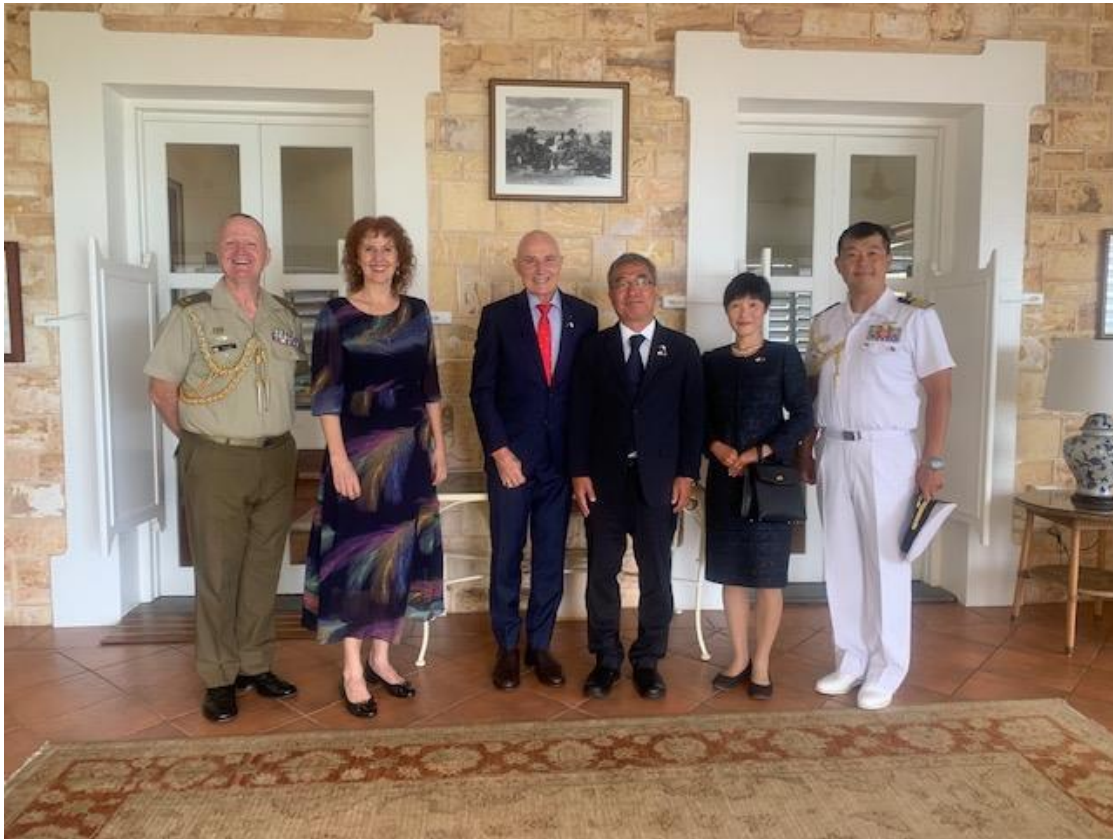
Administrator of the Northern Territory Hugh Heggie attended the sombre service, as well as Captain Tomoyuki Amanuma on behalf of the Embassy of Japan.

Article in the NT News dated 20 February



The USS Peary Commemorative Service

The Bombing of Darwin Commemorative Service



Courtesy call with Administrator Heggie



With Chief Minister Fyles



With Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Education Lawler