

News from Under the Southern Cross (Edition 59):

Revisiting Darwin

2 March 2022

From February 17-20, I visited Darwin – the capital of the Northern Territory. It has been one year since my first visit, which I wrote about in [Edition 4](#) of my News from Under the Southern Cross. This trip might not have been easy on my body – with Darwin regularly seeing temperatures over 30 degrees celsius in the muggy wet season – but it was certainly fruitful in other ways.

1. The 80th Anniversary

This year marks an important anniversary. The Bombing of Darwin occurred 80 years ago, on 19 February 1942. A grand ceremony was held to mark the occasion, with Governor-General David Hurley, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese and Defence Minister Peter Dutton among the attendees.



Prime Minister Morrison and I at the ceremony

It is known that the Imperial Japanese Military bombed Darwin a total of 64 times between February 1942 and November 1943. Many historians agree that the purpose of these attacks

was not to pave the way for an invasion of Australia, but rather to conduct a part of the Imperial Japanese Military's 'Operation FS (Fiji and Samoa)' to sever supply routes from Australia in order to hinder the US forces, Japan's main enemy in that war.

This aside, there is no denying that ordinary civilians were involved and gravely affected by these air raids. It is a situation well understood by the Japanese people, who experienced the horrific atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the massive Air Raid of Tokyo on 10 March 1945 which resulted in 100,000 deaths in a single night. Moreover, the Imperial Japanese Military are the only foreign power ever to have launched an attack on the Australian mainland. With this in mind, I always feel the heavy weight of history whenever I visit Darwin.

2. Prime Minister Morrison's heartwarming speech

Given the occasion, my spirits were lifted by Prime Minister Morrison's speech at the ceremony. Instead of focusing entirely on the events of the past, the Prime Minister reflected on his visit to Darwin in 2018 with the then Prime Minister ABE Shinzo, when together they laid a wreath as a symbol of reconciliation. He then reiterated that Japan has become one of Australia's most trusted and loyal friends.

Moreover, at the conclusion of the ceremony, the Prime Minister immediately approached me. He said to me, "Ambassador, thank you for coming", and firmly shook my hand. Then he took one of the Japanese fans (which were prepared for all attendees as a measure against the oppressive heat), wrote a message to the three Japanese Prime Ministers he had met during his term (*to my dear Shinzo, Yoshi and Fumio*), and handed it to me. It was a thoughtful gesture so typical of Prime Minister Morrison. When I returned to my seat after laying my wreath, I could hear some Australians clapping their hands. This was something that warmed my heart.



The fan I received from Prime Minister Morrison

3. The I-124 Japanese submarine

There were other important ceremonies symbolising reconciliation between Japan and Australia to come during my trip. On 20 January 1942, just before the first of the air bombing, one Imperial Japanese Military's I-124 submarine was sunk by the allied forces of Australia and America off the coast of Darwin. During this trip to Darwin, we were able to unveil a memorial plaque inscribed with the names and ranks of Commanding Officer KISHIGAMI's crew of eighty men.



The memorial plaque for the eighty crew members of the Japanese I-124 submarine with their names and ranks (left); speaking at the unveiling ceremony (right)

As I already mentioned in Edition 4 of News From Under the Southern Cross, the crew's remains still rest in that submarine, which lies on the ocean floor. Many people worked hard during the past year to realise for this event. Being among those that enjoy the peace and prosperity that came after their deaths, we all wanted to express our deepest gratitude and pay tribute to them, reflecting on their dedication and sacrifice.

Without the tireless efforts of many individuals – President Ms Yumiko SHAW and members of the Australian Japanese Association of the Northern Territory (AJANT), Consul-General KIYA and others at the Consulate-General in Sydney, as well as Defence and Naval Attaché to Australia at the Embassy of Japan, Captain ASO – we could not have succeeded in this initiative to install the plaque.

Last but not least, we had the steadfast support of the Northern Territory Government. In addition to taking budgetary measures to support the initiative, Northern Territory Administrator Her Honour the Honourable Vicki O'Halloran AO and her husband, Mr Craig O'Halloran, Chief Minister the Hon Michael Gunner, and many other VIPs from across the Territory attended the ceremony.

(You can find a copy of my speech at the unveiling ceremony [here](#), and my speech for the ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the sinking of the USS Peary [here](#))

4. Speaking at the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

As a part of my public speaking duties, every time I go on a business trip I try to do at least one speech or interview. With this in mind, I was fortunate enough to make an address at the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, arranged by Mr Andrew Blakey, the Director of Protocol for the Northern Territory Government (who also kindly looked after me during my visit last year).



Address at the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

(Photo: Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory)

It was the first time a Japanese Ambassador had spoken there, according to the Legislative Assembly. I was introduced by Speaker Ngaree Ah Kit, then received warm greetings from Chief Minister Gunner and Opposition Leader Lia Finocchiaro. Thanks to their kindness, I was able to take my time and talk in depth about the various facets of cooperation between Japan and the Northern Territory – including the Quad (Japan, Australia, the United States and India), security cooperation, economic cooperation, culture and tourism.

After my speech, when I heard from many Members of the Legislative Assembly that they found

my speech funny and inspiring, my fatigue magically disappeared. I must confess that on that day, I had been totally exhausted, having got up at 4:00 am and having travelled for about 6 hours by taking flights from Canberra to Darwin via Sydney. Then, I thought about a talented staff member of mine, who is among our Embassy's locally engaged staff and who worked so hard to prepare this speech, spending hours with me in my office to brush up the draft. I could not wait to tell this staff member how well our speech was received by the audience. Without a doubt, even a single speech is the fruit of the close cooperation between Japan and Australia. (You can read my address to the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory [here](#))

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