

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 61):

Cowra Rotary Peace Award

9 March 2022

Since I joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1984, I have led a life fairly removed from the realm of public recognition. This being said, my report this time is about one instance of public recognition that, while unanticipated, I am truly grateful for.

1. The Cowra Peace Award

This is a story that began last year, when I was notified by a representative from Cowra that they would award me with the 2021 Rotary Club of Cowra Peace Award (you can find the outline of my first visit to Cowra in my News From Under the Southern Cross – [Edition 3](#)).

At first, I could not believe my ears. They told me they would like me to come to Cowra for an award ceremony and dinner. I have lived as a public servant, a role which, generally speaking rarely receives praise, so I was overwhelmingly pleased, and without hesitation confirmed that I will accept the award. However, due to COVID-19, I had been unable to visit Cowra for quite a long time. It was not until February this year that I was finally able to visit Cowra to receive this award.

I learned that up until now the award has primarily been given to the residents of or those who are active in Cowra. The list of past recipients includes Cr Bill West, Mayor of Cowra, Mr Bob Griffiths, Chairman of the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre and many other prominent figures in Cowra. I was to be the first Japanese recipient of the award.



Cr Bill West, Mayor of Cowra (left) and Mr Bob Griffiths, Chairman of the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre, who came all the way from Cowra to attend November's 'Sharing Your Experience of Japan' reception at my residence.

2. Revisiting Cowra

This was my fourth visit to Cowra since taking up my post as Ambassador. Although the purpose of this visit was to attend the dinner and receive my award, I thought I should make the most of this trip. After all it took me two hours to travel to Cowra! Upon my request, I was able to see the beloved Japanese garden again.

Unfortunately, it was raining on and off all day. But perhaps because of that, what ordinarily would have been a parched country town was transformed into a world of luscious green. The lawns of the Japanese garden are so well taken care of they looked like carpet, shining and vividly dotted with thick groves of green eucalyptus trees.



With Mr Griffiths and his wife, overlooking the elegant Cowra Japanese Garden
surrounded by the magnificent Australian bush

People believe that, in this garden, the souls of Japanese soldiers are resting in the rocks and

those of Australian soldiers in the trees. We rang the peace bell and joined our hands in prayer. I expressed my deepest condolences for the precious lives lost of both Japanese and Australian soldiers during the Cowra Breakout, and my sincere appreciation for their dedication.



We prayed that the sound of the peace bell would soothe the souls of the Japanese and Australian soldiers who lost their lives.

3. The Award Ceremony and Dinner

What a heartwarming dinner it was!

We dined on lamb, a local specialty. Such a treat! However, what heartened my wife and me most was the thoughtfulness of the residents of Cowra who welcomed us so warmly.

During the meal, many attendees spoke to me and shared their stories:

“When my mother was young, she spent several tough years in a Japanese Prisoner of War camp. But she holds no ill will towards the younger generations of Japanese people. Even now, she has hosted Japanese students for homestays.”

“I saw you and your wife on TV last week laying a wreath in Darwin and I was very moved.”

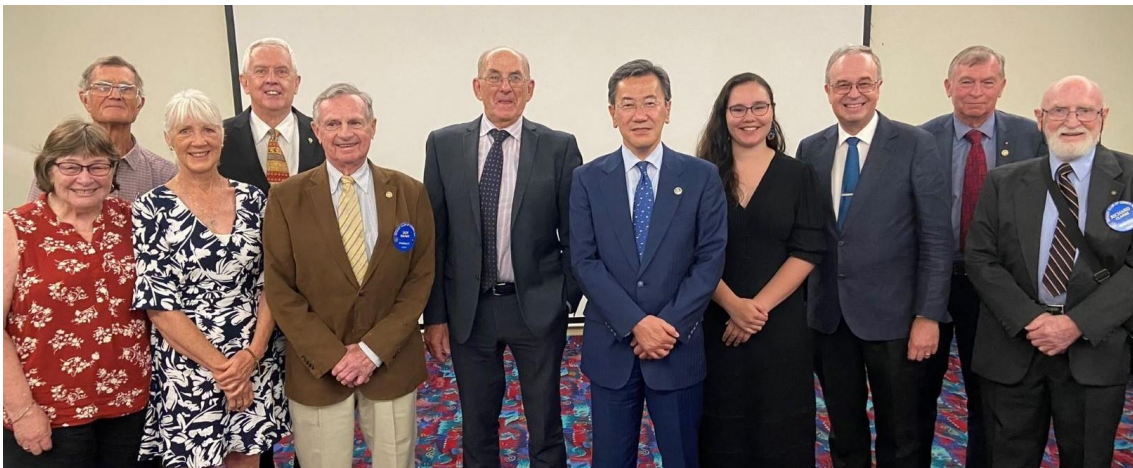
“The terrible situation in Ukraine makes Japan-Australia cooperation all the more relevant and necessary.”



Receiving the Cowra Peace Award from Mr Ian Docker, President of the Rotary Club of Cowra



Mingling with guests during the dinner



With previous recipients of the Cowra Peace Award at the end of the dinner

4. The Power of Reconciliation

With these words, I finally understood. This award was not about my personal achievements, but is proof that, through the hard work of Japanese and Australians, we have achieved reconciliation. In this sense, the real recipients of this award should be our predecessors, in acknowledgement of their efforts and dedication over many years.

In his congratulatory speech, Mayor West joked that I presented him with my credentials before I had even presented them to the Governor-General, which was well-received by the audience.



Cr Bill West, Cowra Mayor and I making our speeches

That night, I felt the thoughtfulness and warm wishes of the people of Cowra towards Japan. The Southern Hemisphere will soon welcome the start of autumn, and in my heart I pledged to visit Cowra once again to see the famous fall leaves at their Koyo Matsuri.

(You can find my acceptance speech [here](#))

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