

**Speech by His Excellency Ambassador SUZUKI Kazuhiro at the
Inaugural May Weir Memorial Morning Tea at the Cowra
Japanese Garden 5th August 2024**

- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
- We find ourselves once more gathered here in Cowra to commemorate what was a pivotal moment in our bilateral relationship.
- 80 years ago, the residents of Cowra had every reason to believe that the 5th of August would be a day much like every other day.
- After all, it was a Saturday, and there was shopping to be done during the morning, or perhaps a footy game planned for the afternoon.
- The call of a bugle from the prisoner of war camp just over the hill, soon accompanied by the sound of gunfire, shouting and the glow of fire lighting up the pre-dawn sky, shattered the peace of that Saturday morning and changed the history of Cowra, and with it Japan and Australia relations, forever.

- The lives lost on that fateful morning were a tragedy.
- Yet something extraordinary also happened that same morning.
- Mrs May Weir, despite knowing that escaped Japanese prisoners of war found on the Weir farm at Rosedale must have come from the POW camp, served them tea and scones while waiting for authorities to arrive.
- They were incredible acts of kindness amid a chaotic situation, acts of generosity that will never be forgotten.
- That we meet today in recognition of May Weir, and enjoy the same hospitality she offered to the POWs so many years ago, is testament to the nobility of the human spirit here in Cowra – a spirit personified in the figure of May Weir.
- Ladies and gentlemen, I stand before you this morning as the Ambassador of Japan. Yet, as some of you already know, I am also the son of a former Kamikaze pilot, who could not die off the coast of Okinawa in 1945 along with his mates from the same squadron.

- This sense of shame tormented my father until his death at the age of 85.
- Yet, this pain was exactly the reason why he taught me repeatedly when I was a primary school-aged child the importance of respecting peace, respecting your service to the country, and above all, respecting those who died for their country, whether friend or foe.
- I am sure that the same sort of pain of shame that my father endured for so long was the motivation behind so many Japanese prisoners' tragic conduct.
- This is why I have been so deeply and personally touched by the people of Cowra, for your graciousness and generosity, understanding and respect, which has withstood the test of time, to those Japanese people who died 8000km from home, symbolized by your tending to their graves in such a dignified manner.
- This is indeed living proof of the power of reconciliation.

- In the eighty years since the 5th of August 1944, the Japan-Australia relationship has been completely transformed.
- Starting with our broad trade relationship, a relationship that continues to grow broader and deeper, we have become special strategic partners, allies in all but name.
- We negotiate, operate and cooperate with one another, helping to preserve the rules-based order and the peace and prosperity of our region.
- But perhaps more than any of this, we have become the best of mates.
- That friendship is a result of generations of Japanese and Australians travelling to one another's countries, learning about each other's cultures, and seeking to genuinely understand one another.
- Curiosity led to generosity, which in turn led to affinity.
- In today's world beset by problems, the fact that we can look to this town in central New South Wales for inspiration on how to overcome differences to build a better future is a source of

solace and hope.

- It is to the everlasting credit of the residents of Cowra, of generations past and present, and above all to the members of the Cowra Breakout Committee, the Nagakura Foundation and the Bruce and Margaret Weir Trust, for reaching out in friendship, for seeking to understand the past and interpret it so that its lessons may never be forgotten.
- We owe them a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid, for through their efforts we all learn about the better nature of humanity, here among the rolling hills of Cowra.
- May it forever be so.
- Thank you.

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