



“Nurungi”

Remembered

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CONCORD HERITAGE SOCIETY

email: chs@concordheritage.asn.au

www.concordheritage.asn.au

EDITOR
LOIS MICHEL
9744-8528

PRESIDENT
MARK DURANCE
9743-0583

PUBLIC RELATIONS
Vacant

SECRETARY/TREASURER
LOIS MICHEL
3 Flavelle Street
(P.O. Box 152)
Concord 2137
Phone: 9744-8528
Fax: 9744-7591

MEETINGS

General Meetings
1st Saturday of month
(except January)
at 2:00 pm in the
City of Canada Bay
Museum
1 Bent Street, Concord
9743-3034

Executive Meetings
4th Wednesday of month
at 7:30 pm in the
Museum
(all members welcome)

Walker Estates Committee
This position is vacant

Tours Organiser
Sandra Elliott, 9797-1040
ttoille@optusnet.com.au

Museum Committee
Meets on 2nd Wednesday of
month at 9:30 am at museum
Chairperson
Lorraine Holmes, 9743-2682

Oral History Committee

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CITY OF CANADA BAY MUSEUM

1 Bent Street, Concord

Open Wed & Sat
10am to 4pm

Phone: 9743-3034

No.185

January/February 2012

Commemorating Sydney's submarine attack

by Gregory Blaxell*



The Kuttabul awash at her berth at Garden Island (Photo: Graeme Andrews Collection).

On Thursday, 19 January, 2006, I attended the unveiling of a plaque dedicated to the memory of the three Japanese midget submarine that attacked Sydney Harbour on the evening of 31 May 1942.

Two of the three submarines were destroyed and their crews killed. The third sub has never been found*. Twenty-one Allied sailors died when a torpedo, aimed at the cruiser USS *Chicago*, missed its target and slammed into the sea wall and then exploded under Kuttabul moored at Garden Island.

Another torpedo ran up onto the rocks near Kuttabul but did not explode. It was successfully defused and retrieved the next day.

In May 1942, five large mother Japanese submarines were stationed off Sydney Heads. Three of them carried Kohyoteki class midget submarines.

On 30 May at around 3 a.m. when the mother submarines were around 35 nautical miles off the coast, one of them, R 21, surfaced and launched a reconnaissance aircraft piloted by W.O. Susumu Ito.

The plane was carried in pieces in a specially prepared hold in the submarine and was assembled on the deck. The aircraft, launched using a catapult, was armed with explosives and headed for Sydney flying at a height of 500m. The pilot noted that he was generally surprised to find that there were no blackout precautions being observed in Sydney Harbour. He also noted that the lights were still on at Sydney Airport. As he approached the Harbour he flew over

North Head then descended to 200m, as he was now sure that he would not be attacked by anti-aircraft fire. The aircraft made two and a half circuits of the harbour, including one leg that took him west of the Harbour Bridge to somewhere in the vicinity of Cockatoo Island.



The Japanese Deputy Consul General of Japan, Mr. Hiroshi Manabe, speaking at the unveiling, as the Naval Colour Party stands to (Photo: Gregory Blaxell)

After W.O. Susumu Ito acquainted himself with the naval shipping, he flew back to the submarine. He had some trouble finding the vessel but when he did, he made his landing close by but hit the top of a huge swell. The plane flipped over and began to sink. He scrambled out and swam towards the submarine and was hauled aboard by the scruff of his neck. He said he felt like a wet kitten.

The Japanese commanding officer, with the reconnaissance information obtained from Ito's flight, decided to attack Sydney Harbour with his midget submarines the next night.

The naval vessels in Sydney Harbour at the time were: the heavy cruiser *USS Chicago*, two destroyers, *USS Perkins* and *USS Dobbin*, the mine-layer *HMAS Bungaree* and the Royal Indian minelayer *HMAS Bombay* (all in the Man-o-War Anchorage).

The heavy cruiser *HMAS Canberra* was in Farm Cove and the armed merchant cruisers *HMAS Kanimbla* and *HMAS Westralia* were in Neutral Bay with the *HMAS Adelaide* on the west side and *HMAS Geelong* and *HMAS Whyalla* on the north-west corner of Garden Island. The Royal Netherlands Navy submarine K-IX and the converted suburban ferry *Kuttabul* were at the southeast corner of Garden Island.

These were in addition to a number of small naval craft occupied in harbour defence.

A crew of two manned each midget submarine. A composite, reconstructed midget sub is on permanent display at the National War Memorial, Canberra. These submarines were launched from mother subs that had approached to within seven nautical miles of the coast.

Each midget sub had to manoeuvre its way into the Harbour, avoid the shoals and reefs and sneak through a partly-completed anti-torpedo, boom defence net that stretched from Georges Heights (where the memorial is situated) to Green Point, just east of Watsons Bay.

The first sub to enter was Midget 14, manned by Lt Kenshi Chuma and P.O. Takeshi Omori. [I have reversed the order in which Japanese names are usually written by placing the given name before the family name.] Midget 14 fouled the net and was detected.

The crew tried vainly to free the vessel by repeatedly going ahead and astern. The harbour defence vessel *HMAS Lolita*, a converted yacht, dropped two depth charges that failed to explode because of the shallowness of the water. Just as another harbour defence vessel, *HMAS Yarroma* was approaching and about to launch its depth charges, the crew of M-14 ignited the self-demolition explosives, destroying the vessel and killing both young men.



Depth charges exploding in Chowder Bay during the Japanese midget submarine attack on 1 June 1942. (Photo: N. Bryne, taken with a Box Brownie Camera. Graeme Andrews Collection)

The second sub, M-24, evaded the boom net by entering the Harbour under the keel of the collier *SS Mortlake Bank*. It was the one that fired its torpedoes and it is the one that has never been found. It was manned by Sub-Lt Katsuhisa Ban and P.O. Mamoru Ashibe.



One of the Japanese midget submarines lifted from the bottom of Taylors Bay (Photo: Graeme Andrews Collection)

The third sub, M-21, crewed by Sub-Lt Keiu Matsuo and P.O. Tsuzuku Masao did not fire its torpedoes and was sunk by depth charges in Taylors Bay. Both crew members shot themselves.

I have always known about the midget subs and I remember vividly the night, although I was very young. My father was away somewhere in the Middle East so there was only my mum, my brother and me at home.

We heard the air raid sirens, had a visit from the street's air raid warden, my mum filled the bath with water and we sat there, in the dark, listening to the explosions and conscious of the search lights sweeping the sky.

To my mum, it could have been the start of a Japanese invasion but she sat there calmly and talked with us until the all clear sounded. The next morning, the reports of the attack were made public. I never knew the names of the Japanese crew members who died as a result of that attack.

My attendance at this moving unveiling ceremony focused my attention on the reality that the Japanese submariners were highly skilled and very brave young men. I have purposely given the names of the Japanese submariners who made the attack.

It fills me with considerable pride now to know that the four lads whose bodies were recovered from the wrecked submarines, were given a full, military funeral by the Australian Navy.

This ceremony was carried out at the Eastern Suburbs Crematorium on Tuesday, 9 June and their ashes were returned to their families in Japan, even though the war was still raging. The funeral of the men killed aboard *Kuttabul* was held at Rookwood Cemetery on 2 June. They were buried with full military honours.

Governor Bashir spoke about the at-

tack and the 'dignified and culturally sensitive funeral' given to the submariners. She also spoke about the visit of a mother of one of the sailors who came to Sydney after the war and spread cherry blossoms on the waters of the Harbour as a tribute to all those lost on that night.

There were addresses from two Japanese representatives; apt. Naruto Nishi, the Japanese Defence Attaché, and Mr Hiroshi Manabe, the Deputy Consul-General of Japan.

Captain Nishi said, "the legacy ... was a demonstration of the tremendous bravery of the Japanese seamen ... but also of the great generosity and chivalry of the Australian Navy ... [both of which] are of great significance today for the children of the future."

There were other speakers, all of whom stressed the spirit of friendship and co-operation that now exists between two former enemies.

However, the last word came from the commanding Officer *HMAS Penguin*, Commander Piers Chandler, an ex-submariner. He spoke about the, "great feat of seamanship" of the Japanese sailors and remarked that when any submariners are lost, they are said to be on "eternal patrol".

A plaque was unveiled by the naval representatives of Japan and Australia, the Navy Colour Party marched off and the guests then inspected the plaque.

Every human dimension had been added to my understanding of the attack by midget submarines on Sydney Harbour in 1942.

Written by Gregory Blaxell and published in the June 2006 issue of Afloat. Published with permission.

Gregory Blaxell is an historian and author. He has been boating offshore and in the harbour for more than 25 years. His latest book is *The River: Sydney Cove to Parramatta*.



VIP guests, including the Governor, Her Excellency Prof. Marie Bashir, photographed at the memorial. (Photo: Greg Blaxell)

* In November 2006, part of the mystery of the midget submarine from I-24 was solved when divers discovered the wreck of the submarine off Sydney's northern beaches. We will probably never know if Lieutenant Ban and his navigator, Petty Officer Ashibe Mamoru intended to rejoin their 'mother' submarine or whether they had no intention of returning and simply scuttled their vessel.

School Days, School Days, Dear old Golden Rule Days (Wartime in Concord)

For me, school life began at the start of 1941 – I can still remember my first day at Mortlake School. Even though I only lived three doors down in Archer Street, I still cried my eyes out when Mum left me there with the assurance that she would be back to pick me up in the afternoon. Miss Greig took me to her heart and put me on the rocking horse that they had in Kindy – I think we nearly all had rides on that rocking horse at some stage.

Before long I was turning up for school before the cleaners, helping to fill the coal scuttle with coal from under the school. In those days each classroom had a fireplace which had a fire burning all day, and the cleaners had to clean the grates and light the fires before classes commenced so the smoke would be out of the rooms and the fires well alight before the children arrived.

During the war, when Australia began to get warning of an invasion from Japan, our parents were asked to work weekends digging air-raid shelters in the playground between the Primary School and the Infants' School. The shelters were dug within weeks, the Education Department had them roofed over and then covered with dirt. Duckboards were laid on the floor because of water seepage and seating put along both sides of the walls with heavy wooden doors at all exits.

One day Dick Moys and myself went to school early just to explore the air raid shelters before the teachers arrived. However, one of the cleaners, seeing the door open, closed and bolted it . . . and you can guess who was locked in and then had to be let out by the teachers.

Needless to say, we were "lined up" for a couple of days – that was the punishment in those days. You were "lined up" at the edge of the playground during playtime and lunchtime while all your mates played and you just stood there, not allowed to move.

Then came air-raid practice. The siren would sound (from somewhere over Concord West way, although I never did find out where it was located) and it could be heard all over Concord. The children were marched out into the air-raid shelters and seated. We had all been issued with a small round piece of rubber which we clenched between our teeth and were told if bombs were dropped we were to cover our ears with our hands, bite on the piece of rubber and put our heads

down between our knees. Thank God it didn't become a reality. The all-clear siren would sound and everyone would then march back into class.

We all felt safe during that time because the Army Camp was located on Concord Private Golf Course, equipped with Ack Ack guns and searchlights.

The pupils were asked to collect scrap aluminium pots and pans to be melted down for the war effort.

Our parents were not forgotten either – those who were not away in the war were asked to join in with the Air Raid Wardens to help with any crisis that may happen at the school.

One Saturday a simulated bomb blast on the Primary School was staged and all the parents were asked to help with the evacuation of casualties. My older sister Helen was winched down from an upstairs window, on a stretcher, with supposed head and leg injuries. She was taken to North Strathfield Public School, which was a casualty clearing station. The part she didn't like was having to walk home from there when it was all over.

We also had fire drills. A couple of houses in each street had a red bucket and a stirrup pump to put out any fires, plus the school had a red bucket full of sand to pour over incendiary bombs if they landed in the school grounds.

Thankfully all these precautions were never put into effect and are only now memories – memories of the lovely teachers we had like Miss Greig, Miss Minogue, Mrs. Kelsey and, in Primary School, Mr. Gibbons (Headmaster) and Mr. Stutchbury. Memories of Mr. Stutchbury calling you out to be caned, taking off his coat, getting out his cane from the cupboard, taking a couple of practice swings through the air, then telling you to be seated and not to misbehave again.

As I said, they are all memories now but what great days they were, playing footie in bare feet because mum couldn't afford shoes, holes in the back of your pants with patches sewn on them and the chapped legs in winter from short pants rubbing on your leg.

Bill Green (1941-1947)



There's a War On! World War II at Home

16 April to 17 June, 2002

We are hosting a **Travelling Exhibition, through Museums & Galleries NSW, for Heritage Week**. They will supply banners, descriptive panels, and other paraphernalia but we need to supplement these with local items and stories.

This is a big exhibition and will be well advertised so we want to add as much local input as possible. It is supported by Museums & Galleries NSW, Dept. of Veterans' Affairs, Australian War Memorial, SHP and Communities Arts NSW.

We need to stress that this is "the war at home", not overseas. We are looking for uniforms (VAD, Land Army, etc.); wartime posters; medals; certificates, photographs, letters, wartime wedding gowns and whatever else you can think of.

We would also like to have stories of your or your family's contribution to the war effort - wardens, working in the factories, boat building, or just as a citizen.

What are your childhood memories and experiences of the times? Air raid warnings, shelters, submarine attack, family, other. How did the war affect you?

Meeting Reminders

Executive Meetings are held on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm

Next Meeting: Wed. 25th Jan.

General Meetings are held on the 1st Saturday of each month, commencing at 2:00 pm with a guest speaker.

Next Meeting: Sat. 4th Feb.

Museum Committee meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 9:30 am

Next Meeting: Wed. 8th Feb

Members are reminded that they are welcome to attend any of these meetings. Last year attendance was tending to drop off and this made it difficult when inviting speakers or attending to business, whether it be for the society or for the museum.

Please try to attend whenever possible as we need your help.

This and other matters will be addressed more fully at our next General Meeting. Come and share your thoughts.

We need YOUR help!!

WORKING BEES: We will be holding working bees on the next two Saturdays - 21st and 28th January (morning and afternoon) to temporarily move storage boxes out of the store-room so we can erect our new shelving. We then need to bring the boxes back and store them on the shelving.

We also have to put up the hangers for our gallery system and move some objects around.

As well, we need some light carpentry work for storage of our paintings and large framed photographs.

Please come and lend a hand.

TEXTILE COLLECTION: We need someone to help us identify fabrics, embellishments and eras, so we can complete the cataloguing of our collection. Can you help, or do you know of someone who would volunteer some time?

SENIORS' WEEK: Help with catering and also welcoming visitors. See article next column.

ORAL HISTORIES: Our collection needs to be transferred to our computer. This is very simple work - just loading tape into the machine and pressing a button, then listening to the tape to create a Log of interesting sections for easy reference.

NURSERY RHYME DISPLAY - to be held in December/January. Help needed to sew some rag dolls - minimal sewing knowledge required.

Display Plans for 2012

February - Valentine's Day - need anything that says "Romance"

March - Seniors' Week - Collecting Oral Histories - need volunteers

April through May - The War at Home, World War II - need support material. See page 2.

June - Royalty - QEII 60th Anniversary of ascending the throne - need support material

July - ?

August - Concord Council Anniversary

September - History Week - to be decided

October - ?

November - ?

December through January - The True History of Nursery Rhymes.

Do you have any suggestions on what we can do to support any of these projects? Do you have any suggestions for the vacant months?

Seniors' Week

"Sharing the Memories"

In conjunction with the Local Studies section of the Libraries, we will be holding morning and afternoon teas at the **Museum on Wednesday 23rd and Saturday 26th March at 10:30 am and 2:00 pm each day.**

We will also join David Sansome at the Drummoyne Community Centre on **Friday, 13th April at 10:30 am** for the same project.

We are inviting resident to come along and join us to share their memories of the area. Stories, anecdotes and recollections will be recorded and added to our Oral History collection.

These Oral Histories are important as they give us a better insight into the personal history of the area by providing a picture of the past in people's own words.

CATERING: We need members' help in catering for the four events at the museum and also to chat to the people who come along to encourage their memories. We are not looking for anything elaborate in the way of catering, just tea or coffee and some biscuits and small cakes/scones. Can you help?

It's Moments Like These . .



It's amazing what you can find on the net!!

From the Secretary's Desk

WELCOME: We would like to welcome Betty Weismantel and Timothy Heffernan as new members and look forward to getting to know them better in the months to come.

VALENTINES DAY: We are planning a Valentines Day display for February. Do you have any old Valentine's Day Cards or other such tokens you could lend us for the month? Anything that says "Romance" - cards, ornaments, photographs, etc.

SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENTS: A reminder to those members who have been working with Karen on this project that we need to have these documents as soon as possible. If anyone else would like to help with this work it is only a matter of choosing an object and then doing as much research as possible about it.

We have listed the events planned and if you can help with getting objects or stories to support them we would be most grateful. We particularly need help with the War at Home display. If you know of anyone who can contribute to this please talk to them and get them to contact us. This is urgent.

NURSERY RHYME DISPLAY: We are still looking for old Nursery Rhyme books. Do you have any, or can you keep a look out at garage sales and op shops.

2012 DISPLAYS: We have listed all our current ideas for displays. Please check them out and let us know if you have anything you can give or lend to support any. We need to have details about a month before the set dates so we can finalise display plans. It is particularly urged to source support for our "War at Home" Exhibition. Please talk to anyone you think might be able to help. Chat about it to friends and neighbours - you never know what information could be forthcoming.



On behalf of the society we would like to express our deepest sympathy to Terry & Beryl Robinson on the loss of his mother and to Trish Skehan and family on the loss of her sister.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you at this sad time.