

Commemoration of the sinking of Imperial Japanese Navy submarine I-124

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In a short combat action on 20 January 1942 outside Darwin, Imperial Japanese Navy submarine I-124 was lost battling against Royal Australian Navy corvette HMAS Deloraine. Tom Lewis recounts the event and the commemoration ceremonies in Darwin.

Key words: Japanese submarine I-124; HMAS Deloraine; Darwin, Australia; shipwreck.

In a short, sharp combat action 75 years ago on 20 January 1942 outside the port of Darwin, Imperial Japanese Navy submarine I-124 was lost battling against Royal Australian Navy corvette HMAS Deloraine.

One of the four boats of the Japanese Sixth Submarine Division that attacked shipping and laid mines outside the port in the early months of the Pacific War, the I-124 was sunk in deep water outside the harbour, where her wreck remains sealed and intact today. The sinking was followed by two attempts to raise the submarine, and several controversies, before the wreck was protected by the formation of the *Australian Historic Shipwrecks Act, 1976* (C'wlth).

The Australian-Japanese Association of the Northern Territory considered there should be some commemorative marking in the area where the first combat action of the Top End took place; and where 80 men had lost their lives and remain entombed today. So, in a two-year project, the Association worked with the Australian federal and territory governments to place a commemorative plaque, carrying a description of the action, on a plinth at Casuarina Cliffs north of Darwin.

At a reception held on 17 February 2017 at Darwin's Parliament House, the plaque was unveiled by His Excellency Mr Sumio Kusaka, Japan's Ambassador to Australia; Senator the Honourable Nigel Scullion, Senator for the Northern Territory; The Honourable Michael Gunner MLA, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory; Ms Kathleen Bresnehan, President of the Australian-Japanese Association of

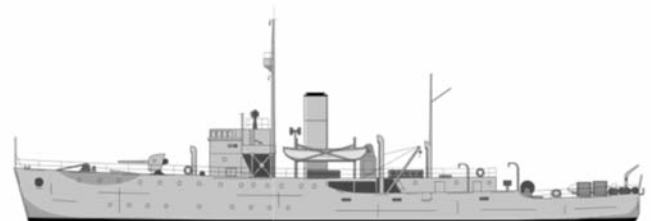
the Northern Territory; and Dr Tom Lewis OAM, military historian and author of *Darwin's Submarine I-124*².

Mr Takashi Ootaki, grandson of crew member Petty Officer Second Class Ryohei Ootaki, made a short speech. World War II RAAF veteran, Mr Brian Winspear AO, who experienced the first Darwin air raid, was present in his uniform and in the finale of the event, shook hands with the Japanese Ambassador. Those attending were gifted with a paper crane to take away, each of which carried the name of an I-124 submariner. At the end of the event, 80 balloons were released to free the souls of the dead from the submarine.

The plaque was supplied by the Department of Defence, whose Defence Science & Technology Group supplied a sonar image for it of the I-124 taken only months previously. Subsequent to the unveiling ceremony, the plaque was installed on a plinth at Casuarina Cliffs, overlooking the sea.



Japanese submarine I-124 [Source: Tom Lewis]



The corvette HMAS Deloraine [Source: Peter Ingman]

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²Dr Tom Lewis (2012). *Darwin's Submarine I-124: the story of a covert Japanese squadron waging a secret underwater war against northern Australia* (Avonmore Books: Kent Town, S. Aust.).