

JAPANESE NAVAL VISIT TO TASMANIA OF 1924

by
Reg. A. Watson
www.regwatson.com

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It is well worth to recall a visit to Australia, which included Tasmania, in 1924 of the Japanese fleet.

On January 18th 1924 after gliding up the River Derwent three vessels berthed at Kings and Queens Piers in Hobart. The leading officer was Vice-Admiral Shichigoro Saito aboard the flagship *Asama*. After berthing, a formal call on Saito was made by the Premier Joe Lyons and other government and military dignitaries. Newspapers wrote of the day, that they represented “warships of a great and friendly power.”

Vice-Admiral Saito proceeded to Government House where he paid an official visit to His Excellency. During an interview with the press and through an interpreter, Saito expressed pleasure in Japan being Australia’s ally during World War I.

He said, “Japan was honoured” to offer to the Commonwealth a little service in its time of danger.”

He observed that he felt “honoured” on arrival in Australia to find that the people of the country thought such a lot of what Japan had been able to do.

“Nor was Japan’s friendliness towards Britain forgotten,” said Vice-Admiral Saito. “I can safely say that the feeling of the Japanese people towards the people of Great Britain has not in the least changed.”

He also found that the feelings of the Australian people towards Japan were as cordial as ever they had been.

On Sunday travelling by train the Vice-Admiral, fifty officers and two hundred men visited Launceston which he described as a fine city.

Banner headlines stated, “Launceston and Japan clasp hands – comrades in arms – friends in peace.” Arriving at the Launceston station, they were met by a large crowd.

Walking through the station, Vice-Admiral Saito, accompanied by officers, was greeted by the city band playing the Japanese national anthem. He then inspected the guard of honour. Leaving the railway yard, the press of the day stated, “A great roar of cheering from the people occurred,” and it was “even increased in volume as the ranks of smiling men swept out of the station yards.”

The Japanese were entertained at a civic reception, but beforehand, 6000 Launcestonians witnessed the mayor welcoming them in York Park.

In reply, Vice Admiral Saito said, "During the recent war, Japan, by virtue of her line with Great Britain, fought against Germany and during that war we found out what splendid troops Australia had."

He thanked Australia for sending money and food to Japan after the recent earthquake and added, "The people of Japan will never forget the help given by Australians in Japan's time of need."

"Japan and Great Britain are linked in an alliance which is a bulwark for the peace of the world," he said.



Vice-Admiral Shichigoro Saito

In honour of the Japanese ships visiting Tasmania, a vice regal ball was held at the Albert Hall where 300 guests attended.

The Japanese returned to Hobart by train the following day accompanied by the Mayor of Launceston, Mr James.

Following the four day visit, the Japanese squadron departed Hobart for Sydney on January 22. According to a report, many people were awakened by "The loud sounding sirens and ringing bugle calls with which the admiral and his officers and men said goodbye to the city and state."

Prior leaving, the Vice-Admiral gave his deep appreciation for the way that he and his officers had been received in Tasmania and hoped that it would not be many years before they had an opportunity of meeting and renewing their happy relationship.

Alas it was not to be a happy reunion. Vice-Admiral Saito was not involved in World War II.

The following pictures are of the visit.



