FOREWORD

Since the end of the Second World War, Japan and Australia have developed amicable relationship over a long period of time through mutually beneficial economic relationship and wide-ranging people-to-people exchanges. In recent years, the two countries have also been further strengthening cooperation in security and defense areas in order to contribute to the peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and the international community. Today, the two countries stand together as the “Special Strategic Partners” that share fundamental values and strategic interests.

In the past, there was a time when Japan inflicted tremendous damage and suffering on many people, including Australian Prisoners of War (POWs). As stated by Prime Minister Abe in his statement on August 14, 2015, Japan expressed the feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology and made a pledge for peace that it will never repeat the devastation of war. I would like to express my whole-hearted gratitude to the people of Australia for demonstrating the spirit of tolerance and extending friendly hands to Japan, instead of hostility from the past memory.

The Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme started in 1997 in order to invite former Australian POWs and their family members to Japan and encourage the “heart-to-heart reconciliation and exchanges” as well as to promote mutual understanding and friendly relations between the two countries. To this date, 120 former POWs, their families and other participants have visited Japan.

Those visited Japan deepened their understanding on Japan’s efforts toward peace and prosperity as well as our society and culture. They also paid a visit to local cities where former POW camps were located as well as the Commonwealth War Cemetery. Every time the former POWs and their family members visited Japan, the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs met with the former POWs in person and earnestly listened to their experiences at the time and their views on how to enhance future-oriented relations between Japan and Australia. I believe that this programme has promoted “heart-to-heart exchanges” between the two countries that lead us to the future.

On the other hand, in light of the decrease in the number of former POWs who can travel to Japan, we consulted with the Returned and Services League of Australia and decided to conclude the programme by holding commemorative events both in Japan and Australia this year. We also decided to review the achievements made through this programme.

Although the programme will come to an end, our efforts on bilateral exchanges toward a peaceful future will never end. Building on the spirit and significance of the programme, Japan will promote bilateral exchanges among younger generations of the two countries.

This report elaborates on the historic significance of the programme, drawing upon the voices of the participants from both sides. It is my sincere hope that this report will be of help in encouraging people of both Japan and Australia to join hands towards the future and to cooperate for a peaceful and prosperous world by leaving a firm footprint of the reconciliation between Japan and Australia.

September, 2017
Taro Kono
Minister for Foreign Affairs
In 2017 Australians have commemorated the 75th anniversary of several key events from the Second World War.

As a nation we have honoured the service and sacrifice of the men and women who defended our country, our values and our freedom.

Close to one million Australians enlisted during World War II. Of those, the Australian War Memorial’s Roll of Honour lists the names of almost 40,000 who died, many thousands more were wounded and some 30,000 became prisoners of war.

When we remember our wartime history we reflect on the tragic cost of war that is borne by individuals, families and communities.

It is in this spirit that I am pleased to provide a foreword to the report about the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme.

The project was an initiative of the government of Japan with support from the Australian RSL.

The project saw Australian, former Prisoners of War and members of their families visit Japan as the guests of the Japanese Government from 2011 to 2017.

Each visit was an opportunity for Australia’s veterans to meet with people from Japan of all ages and to share their experiences.

For this project to succeed, it required participants from both countries to face uncomfortable truths.

And by acknowledging that history and doing so on a human level, the people from Australia and Japan who took part in this project have helped strengthen the bond of friendship and understanding between our two countries.

The government of Japan and the RSL should be thanked for the respect and honour they afforded Australia’s veterans.

The people of Japan should also be thanked for the gracious manner in which they hosted our veterans and their genuine interest in their stories.

When we seek to learn from the dark periods of our history it is to make our present and future brighter.

September, 2017

The Hon Dan Tehan MP

Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
INTRODUCTION

**Australian perspective**

This report is about the *Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme*¹ and focuses on the Australian POWs (and their families) who were invited to visit Japan in friendship as the guests of the Japanese Government of the Programme.

The project is the initiative of the Government of Japan.

Its history can be traced back to 1994/95, and a series of discussions that occurred between Ambassador Kazutoshi Hasegawa of the Embassy of Japan in Australia, Mr Terry Colhoun AM Secretary, Federation of Australia Japan Society and the National President of the Returned and Services League (RSL) of Australia, Major General W.B. “Digger” James, AC, AO(Mil), MBE, MC.

Support for the project grew through a series of successful visits undertaken by the RSL National Executive and by five POWs² invited to visit Japan in 2011 as well as other events such as the completion of the *Hand-of-Friendship* projects³ (1994–2006), the change in the “hard-line” attitudes of the RSL towards Japan⁴ and the steady growth in bi-lateral arrangements (trade/security) between the two nations.

Under the project, there were two long-term programme initiatives. The first was the *Peace, Friendship and Exchange Initiative*, which ran between 1997 and 2005. The second initiative was in 2010 when the Government of Japan revived the project under the name of the *Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme*, which ran from March 2011 to the last visit in January 2017.


Between 1997 and 2005, 59 Australians (comprising former POWs and their families) visited Japan as part of the first friendship programme initiative.

In the later years of the programme (2002 onwards), the newly established *POW Research Network Japan* supported to hosting visitors and recording the details of the visitors (and where they visited) as part of the network’s records⁵.

During this time, the Japanese government invited members of the RSL National Executive to visit Japan (November 2000 and March 2003), and these visits ensured future visits by POWs would include a meeting with government officials, key site visits and an opportunity to meet with Japanese people to share experiences in friendship.

---

¹ The project was known by other names including: the Japan-Australia Exchange Programme, the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme, the Australian POW Invitation Programme, the Japanese/POW Exchange Programme, with the final name of the Japanese government on the 50th Anniversary of the end of the war (1995).

² The friendship visit undertaken by members of the RSL National Executive (November 2002) by Mr Derek Robson (RSL National Secretary), Mr Ian Kennett (TAS State President), MAJGEN David McIachlan (VIC Branch State President), Mr John Burgess (QLD Branch State President), Mr Bill Gaynor (WA Branch State President), and BRIG Peter Evans (ACT Branch State President) and, the visit in March 2011 by five Australian POWs (and their families), where the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs (Mr Seiji Maehara MP) apologised on behalf of the Japanese government to the five former POWs (and their families) for the tremendous damage and suffering inflicted on the POWs during WWII. The five former POWs to receive the apology were Mr Harold G Ramsey, Mr Norman E Anderton, Mr Jack Simmonds, Dr Rowley Richards and Mr George F Brett.

³ The 'Hand-of-Friendship' initiative (1994–2006) promoted “a meaningful and long lasting reconciliation between those who suffered in Australia and Japan as a result of wartime activities, 1941–45”.

⁴ As observed by Mr Terry Colhoun and recorded in his diary – and reported in Hand of Friendship Part I (1994–98) notes

The Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme (2011–2017)

The aim of the revived program was:

“... to deepen the mutual understanding between the two peoples of Japan and Australia by inviting former Australian prisoners of war (POWs) to Japan. The programme is expected to provide an opportunity for further promoting the post-war reconciliation and the people-to-people exchange.”

Between 2011 and 2017 a further 61 Australians (comprising former POWs, the widows of former POWs and their families) visited Japan.

Of these; 22 were former military POWs, three were civilian POWs, and one was a Medical (Nurse) POW. The former POWs were all captured in the Pacific War (1942–1945) by the imperial army and navy of Japan.

Programme design and structure

The former POWs (and their families) were treated with respect and dignity and received an apology from a high-level member of the Japanese government. POWs were also encouraged (and supported) to undertake visits of personal and memorial significance and commemoration.

Each visit incorporated an opportunity to meet with people from Japan (especially the younger generation of Japanese people), where upon the POWs (and their families) had the opportunity to share their stories and answer questions.

The last visit (23–30 Jan 2017)

The last visit to Japan by a surviving POW occurred in January 2017.

Mr Jack Hopgood POW (96) and the surviving widows of three former Australian POWs, (the late Gordon Gibson, Henry Frederick Leech and Ralph Victor Bland) participated in an eight-day visit to Japan along with their families and carers.

Dr Lachlan Grant, Senior Historian at the Australian War Memorial was also invited to participate in the last visit to Japan.

Mr Jack Hopgood lay a wreath at the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Yokohoma, Japan.

---

6 Extracted from the "Basic Information" advice provided to the RSL by the Embassy of Japan Australia for the attention of former POWs (for the March 2011 visit).
Profile of Australians who visited Japan under POW friendship programmes

a. Visits that occurred between JFY\textsuperscript{a} 1997 and JFY 2005

Under the initial programme, 59 Australians accepted the invitation of the Japanese government to visit Japan. The visitors included former Australian POWs, their family members or carers and there were two 'promotional' visits organised for members of the war veteran community and the RSL National Executive.

The success of this programme was apparent from the outset and this (along with the growing acceptance of the need to offer such a programme) would be influential in defining the scope and design of a more structured programme. This would then be used to support the decision by the Japanese government to resume the Japan-Australia Exchange Programme in 2010.

b. Visits that occurred between JFY 2010 and JFY 2016

This table provides a profile overview of the participants who visited Japan between 2011 and 2017.

|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------|

| Number of POWs applying to participate | 7 | 13 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 10 | 1 | 46 |
| Number of POWs invited to participate | 5 | 5 | 4\textsuperscript{a} | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 26 |
| Number of widows, carers etc. participating | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | (1)\textsuperscript{b} | (1)\textsuperscript{b} | 8\textsuperscript{b} | 35 |
| Total number of participants visiting Japan | 10 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 61 (incl. 2 extra guests) |
| Average age of the POWs participating (years) | 89.8 | 91.6 | 87.8 | 92.3 | 94.3 | 95.0 | 96.0 | 92.54 |

SCHEDULE ONE

List of former POWs and widows of former POWs who participated in the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme (2011–17) as part of the post-war reconciliation process.

1–9 March 2011
Harold Ramsey POW (89)
Norman E Anderton POW (89)
Alfred John (Jack) Simmonds POW (88)
Charles Rawland (Rowley) Richards POW (94)
GF (Fred) Brett POW (85)

27 Nov–5 Dec 2011
David W. Barrett POW (89)
Alfred J Ellwood POW (89)
Barton D Richardson POW (91)
Arthur R. Gamble POW (93)
Lorna Johnson POW (96)

1–8 Oct 2012
Colin Begley (Civilian) POW (79)
William Schmitt (Civilian) POW (84)
Colin Hamley POW (90)
Elsa Hatfield (Civilian) POW (88)
June Patricia Martin (Civilian) POW (79)
*Participated as carer

30 Sept–7 Oct 2013
Charles Edwards POW (95)
George (Peter) Dixon POW (92)
Adye Rockliff POW (91)

20–27 Oct 2014
Russell W. Ewin POW (97)
Milton (Snow) Fairclough POW (93)
Louis Hill POW (91)
Richard Ridgwell POW (96)

9–16 Nov 2015
John Gilmour POW (96)
Jack Thomas POW (95)
Keith Fowler POW (95)

23–30 Jan 2017
Jack Hopgood POW (97)
Phyllis Leech, widow of the late Henry Frederick Leech POW
Pauline Gibson, widow of the late Gordon Gibson POW
Diana Bland, widow of the late Ralph Victor Bland POW

7 The two programs enabled 120 Australians to visit Japan in the spirit of understanding, friendship and reconciliation.
8 JFY Japanese Financial Year means the Japanese government’s financial year which runs from 1 April to 31 March of next year.
9 Includes three invitations extended to ‘civilian POWs’ to visit Japan.
10 Additional carers participated in this visit at own expense.
11 Three POW widows were invited. Additionally, one participant (Dr Lachlan Grant) was invited to attend as an historian on behalf of the Australian War Memorial.
Over a period of 6 years from Japan's Fiscal Year (JFY) 2010 to 2016, 61 participants, including former POWs, veterans, and their associates, visited Japan as part of the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Japan has gathered together the voices of those who were involved with the tours by the Australian former POWs to Japan. Below is a summarized version of their voices.

Ms. Taeko Sasamoto, The POW Research Network, Japan
(The POW Research Network hosted exchange meetings with Japanese citizens in Tokyo every year and occasionally accompanied the Australian delegation to various regional cities.)

(a) 2011: I heard that Mr. Harold Ramsey used to have the strongest anti-Japanese feelings among the delegation members. However, to our surprise, his attitude completely changed after his visit to Japan. He said, “I was curious and wanted to meet the Japanese people of today, and decided to come here. This visit meant a lot to me. People are entirely different to those I encountered 65 years ago. They were friendly and kind. I never thought I would praise the Japanese people in my lifetime.” I also heard that he was extremely worried about the people he met when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred two days after his return to Australia. His friends, also former POWs in Victoria and encouraged by Mr. Ramsey’s change, visited Japan one after another.

(b) 2011: Mr. Alfred Ellwood spoke of his experience of harsh torture, and shook with tears in his meeting with the federal parliamentarians. However, in an exchange with citizens the next day, he asked us to find a Japanese soldier who had secretly offered him some food in the POW camp so he could thank him. Despite our extensive search, we could not find the Japanese soldier. Ms. Lorna Johnston talked at an elementary school in Totsuka, Yokohama, where a former POW camp was located. She spoke with the locals who knew the area at the time, and they spent some relaxed time together. Her visit was significant for both sides, as it served as an opportunity to teach the next generation about the buried history of that area and to reach a reconciliation with one another.

(c) 2012: We held an exchange meeting with citizens at Noboricho Elementary School in Hiroshima, where Ms. Sadako Sasaki spent her days before dying of leukemia from radiation caused by the atomic bomb. There, the Australian former POWs were greeted with a chorus of “Waltzing Matilda,” one of Australia’s most famous ballads, and shared their experiences with the children. They also listened to the song “Orizuru ga tobu hi (The day when the paper crane flies)” by the children. They were all in tears by the time they left the school. Afterwards they visited the Children’s Peace Monument at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Mr. Colin Begley offered a thousand paper cranes made by children in Brisbane.

(d) 2013: We held an exchange meeting with citizens living near the former camp site in Sanyo-Onoda City. Both sides enjoyed the conversation about the olden days, and Mr. Adye Rockliff looked very happy and said it was the highlight of his visit. The participants seemed deeply appreciative of the fact that their former foes had overcome difficult times and that they were finally able to share a peaceful moment together.

(e) 2014: We visited the Naoetsu Peace Park, a former POW camp site, which had monuments for both former POWs who lost their lives in the camp and Japanese who were executed for their war crimes. Many Australians and their family members had visited the park after the monuments were built, but no one had laid a wreath at the Japanese monument. However, Mr. Lawrence Hill asked “Where is the Japanese monument?” after he offered flowers to the Australian memorial, whereupon he then laid flowers at the Japanese one. His gesture stunned us and we were deeply touched by the fact that it was the first time that a former POW had lain flowers at the Japanese monument in the 19 years following its establishment. It was the third visit to Japan for Mr. Hill and his mind seemed to have changed a lot as a result of these visits.

(f) 2015: This year’s participants came to Japan after overcoming both physical and psychological wounds. However they did not show any bitterness towards Japan and looked pleased to see today’s Japan which is completely different from that during the war. They met with adorable kindergarten students and said they found signs of a bright future for Japan in them.

(g) 2017: Mr. Jack Hopgood was severely beaten by Japanese soldiers and had his bones broken by them. When asked what he would say if he met a former Japanese soldier, he answered, “Hi, let’s have a beer!”, which caused the meeting to break into peals of laughter. Dr. Lachlan Grant, Senior Historian at the Australian War Memorial, said that while the cruelty of the Japanese tends to be emphasized, many friendships had been secretly fostered among the POWs and Japanese citizens. He said that thoughtful POWs knew that Japanese individuals were fundamentally kind and polite, and that the cruelty they experienced stemmed from the Japanese military. He quoted Dr. Rowley Richards, who visited Japan in 2011, and said that “kindness was a quality that could be found in any fellow human being. Empathy is equally universal.” Dr. Grant concluded by saying that kindness and empathy gave hope for a better world.
Mr. Kengo Kobayashi, Manager, Commonwealth Yokohama War Cemetery (the Australian former POWs paid a yearly visit to the Cemetery.)

I believe that this programme played a significant role. I think the participants were able to have some sense of closure by visiting this cemetery. I sensed it from their words of gratitude and from their calm expressions. I think they felt relieved to see the peace and compassion that are prevalent in today's Japan. I believe that I was able to offer a valuable time to both the former POWs and to the local students of Setogaya Elementary School, with whom they shared their experiences and thoughts in person. Such exchanges will be important for our future.

Mr. David Moreton, Associate Professor, Tokushima University

It was a great honour to assist in this programme seven times between 2011 and 2017. Each time I met the group in Kyoto and enjoyed spending a day or two with them. I am thankful for the opportunity to explain to everyone the history of the temple, Ryozen Kannon, and to show them the important materials related to World War II that are stored there. When we visited the temple, everyone, especially the former POW participants, showed a strong interest in the materials and I was happy to hear from them directly or to read in the post-programme comments or personnel letters afterwards that they were grateful for being able to visit Ryozen Kannon and for my work related to the temple. It was my privilege to play a part in this significant programme by acting as their guide at Ryozen Kannon - a temple built to promote world peace.

Ms. Yoshimi Yasuda, former Deputy Principal of Nakawada Elementary School in Yokohama (Ms. Lorna Johnston, a former military nurse who was interned in the women's POW camp near the school, visited the school in JFY 2011). While the six graders were not familiar with the subject at first, they closely listened to Ms. Lorna's story and asked many questions. The visit took place shortly after the Great East Japan Earthquake, and students sang a song titled "Let's Walk with Our Chin Up" better known as "Sukiyaki", which is often sung at the school. They sang that song for Ms. Johnston. After the meeting with the students, people in the community joined the group. Mr. Kinpei Yamamura, a former chair of the Parent-Teacher Association at the school, came forward and said, “I wanted to meet you.” Ms. Johnston remembered that she had been offered a sweet potato from a boy at the time of her internment. That boy was Mr. Yamamura, and both sides were excited by their reunion. They enjoyed their talk, recalling days past. I was impressed by how pleased Ms. Johnston looked after meeting people she had known during the war.

Deputy Principal of Tokiwadai Elementary School in Itabashi ward, Tokyo (Mr. Russell Ewin, Mr. Lawrence Hill, Mr. Milton Fairclough, and Mr. Richard Ridgwell visited the school in 2014.) I think we were able to provide a valuable opportunity for the former POWs to experience Japanese culture, traditions, and customs by looking at how the first graders took turns in preparing and distributing school meals to their classmates. I believe they were able to deepen their understanding of Japanese culture and primary education by communicating with the innocent and honest children. It was also meaningful for the students to communicate with foreigners as it will facilitate their understanding of the world.

Mr. Naotsugu Shino, Principal, Midorigaoka Kindergarten (Mr. John Gilmour, OAM, Mr. Jack Thomas, and Mr. Keith Fowler visited this Kindergarten in 2015). The former POWs were very kind and sincere, always smiling without showing any resentment. The children enjoyed their time with the guests and it produced many positive benefits. The former POWs also visited the Shinto shrine on the school premises, and told me that they had a good experience at the school.

Mr. Hirotugu Makino, Shin-Etsu Chemical Co., Ltd., General Affairs Section, Takefu Plant (Ms. Pauline Gibson, widow of Mr. Gibson, visited the plant in 2017). Right after her arrival, we gave Ms. Gibson a presentation using documents from the past. At first, she looked tense and sad while listening to the presentation, and I saw tears in her eyes. She may have been thinking of her husband. However, little by little, she started to look more relaxed and her face lit up. Then she told us some stories about the plant which we did not know. They were things that her late husband seems to have told her. Before she left, we took a tour around the factory plant by car, and took pictures at a place where we think her late husband spent his days as a POW. I thought that she felt satisfied with the trip to the plant after I saw her smiling face in a picture taken at the plant.

Mr. Yasushige Kenji, Sanyo-Onoda City Office (Mr. Charles Edwards and Mr. Adye Rockliff visited the office in 2013). We held an exchange meeting with locals for Mr. Edwards and Mr. Rockliff. I believe they enjoyed their conversation. They said that their days as POWs were hard, but the people in the community had helped them unload their luggage when they landed and bartered goods after the war. Such gestures helped them to find some peace. After completing the visit, Ms. Carolyn Archibald, who is the granddaughter of Mr. Edwards and accompanied him to Japan, posted videos of their stay in her blog page and wrote how healing the trip was for Mr. Edwards. I believe that the visit to the former camp site and exchanges with local citizens were meaningful and crucial for the former POWs and their family members to find peace and overcome lingering resentments.
This part of the report focuses on the comments and responses made by former Australian POWs, their widows/families and (in the more recent years) their carers\textsuperscript{13}, all of whom accepted an invitation to visit Japan as a part of the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme.

A summary of the responses made by visiting POWs and their families between 2011 and 2017 follows.

**Analysis of participant responses**

Participants were consistently high in their praise of the programme sponsors (MOFA, the Government of Japan) and supporters (POW Research Network Japan, the Commonwealth Yokohama War cemetery, schools etc.), the visit guides, event hosts and the interpreters, all of whom were seen to go out of their way to ensure all visitors felt supported throughout their visit.

Participants praised all aspects of the programme, with almost all expressing their gratitude and thanks for the invitation to visit Japan under the friendship programmes.

For most visitors, the personal apology given to each former POW by the Government of Japan, and always delivered by a senior member of the government, was the true and memorable highlight of their visit.

Visitors were impressed with the extent of the apology and the genuine expressions of both remorse and sorrow for the pain and suffering inflicted on the Australian POWs at the hands of the imperial army and navy of Japan.

**Apology by the Japanese people**

Few visitors were prepared for the nature and the extent of sincerity expressed in the apology by the government and the words of the Japanese people.

“This was a high point of the trip, and it was very moving to receive an apology.”

– Attributed to a former POW (identity not confirmed) who visited Japan in Nov/Dec 2011.

“WOW, this was amazing and we found the meeting a huge step towards reconciliation.”

– Possibly attributed to Alfred Ellwood (POW) and his family who visited Japan in Nov/Dec 2011.

For many of the visitors, the apology was cited as the point of change, where long-maintained and adverse feelings, overt suspicions and wide-held scepticism gave way to a spirit of forgiveness, friendship, and reconciliation.

\textsuperscript{12} The ‘Voices of Australia’ were sourced from the programme visit records for the visits that occurred between 2011 and 2017 the responses made by the former POWs (and their carers) to the programme questionnaire completed by POWs (2011 to 2017), and the follow-up interviews conducted by the RSL with former POWs.

\textsuperscript{13} Under the Japanese/POW Friendship Programme (2011–17) the Government of Japan broadened the invitation list to include POWs and their carers. The change was made because of the Japanese government’s concerns for the age and health of those POWs who still wished to visit Japan under the programme.
There were new expressions of understanding and acceptance of the nation of Japan, the Japanese people, their national pride and their regret for the suffering caused during the war.

For some, these feelings of acceptance and friendship began to develop in the first few days of their visit and were positively reinforced as the programme visits unfolded.

The visits

The visits fell into three categories; those visits which were of Japanese significance (Hiroshima/Kyoto/Nara), those that were seen to be of Commonwealth significance (Commonwealth Yokohama War Cemetery), and most importantly (for many of the visitors) those visits of personal and memorial significance.

Visitors acknowledged the importance of these visits, with some visitors expressing for the first time their feelings for the suffering and hardship endured by the Japanese people both during and after the war.
This feeling was perhaps best stated by one visitor, who at the end of their visit said;

“... never gave much thought to the fate of the Japanese people after the war. This trip has taught us that much suffering and hardship was endured not only by Australian POWs but also by the Japanese people. Our feelings are no longer one-sided!”

Attributed to Alfred Ellwood (POW) and his family who visited Japan in Nov/Dec 2011.

Many of the visitors to the Commonwealth Yokohama War Cemetery were grateful for the opportunity to visit the cemetery and place flowers on the grave sites of fallen comrades.

The POWs often noted this visit as an important contributor towards acceptance and reconciliation, with most visitors to the cemetery recognising the significance of this important visit.

This statement made by a former POW illustrates this point;

“The POW Research Group had done a lot of work for us. Very emotional visit (Commonwealth Yokohama War Cemetery). We didn’t think anyone in Japan knew or cared about the treatment of POWs. We have been surprised to find the Japanese people are so kind and understanding. Our view has been changed by the Japanese people we have met.”

– Attributed to Harold “Rowley” Ramsey POW (98) and Stephen Ramsey (his son) who visited Japan in March 2011.
The visits of personal and memorial significance also played an important role in the friendship and reconciliation process.

Visitors commented on the significance of these personal visits, and all welcomed the opportunity provided by the Government of Japan to undertake this important part of their journey of reconciliation, forgiveness and friendship.

Individuals openly talked about their feelings when revisiting places that aroused so many personal memories; not all good, but not all bad either.
Changing attitudes towards Japan

Visitors were also asked to comment on their feelings towards Japan and the Japanese people both before and after the visit.

These were some of their comments:

“Still felt hostile towards Japanese armed forces. Tried hard to put the experiences behind me. This trip has helped me on that front.

Meeting the Japanese people. I will be loud in my praises of Japan and the Japanese on my return to Australia.”

– Attributed to a former POW (identity not confirmed) who visited Japan in Nov/Dec 2011.

“Milton’s POW experiences affected his feelings towards Japanese people and culture. He was very bitter for years.

The sincerity and willingness of the people we met in Japan to address the wrongs of the past and embrace reconciliation has been very moving and much appreciated. His (Milton’s) feelings are now very much better.

Milton’s point of view has been turned around by the warmth and generosity of his welcome here. Both of us will remember our time here most fondly.”

– Attributed to the carer of Milton (Snow) Fairclough POW visiting Japan in 2014, aged 93.

“Unsure, but definitely not angry, more like conflicted. Very relaxed and comfortable with everyone.

Japanese people are just the same as Australians.”

“To see is to believe, and to meet real Japanese people takes me out of my world. I find a country to be proud of its endeavours, and justly so.

But from the beginning – meaning 1945 I had no reason to believe it had no place in the world. It lost its war and paid the price – I was neither advocate or Judge – I found a beautiful and respectful country, met a wide spectrum of warm-hearted friends, could ask of nothing more generous than their friendship.

I have had an experience far beyond anything I could have imagined.”

– Attributed to Jack Thomas POW who visited Japan in Nov 2015.

“I had not realised the extent of remorse felt by the Japanese public. It will be a good day when the guilt is replaced by warm friendship”

– Attributed to Graeme Thomas carer to Jack Thomas POW who visited Japan in Nov 2015

“How can one not be greatly impressed by the sincerity I feel by those we have met. After my visit, (I have) a great respect and belief in your (Japan's) progress for a better and sincere drive towards peace.

Before the visit, I do not want to describe my feelings. For many years I hated my captor. My feelings later became neutral because (sic) my hate was destroying me, and so it has been before this visit.

I have given my reasons above. My attitude has completely changed. I hope I can be a good ambassador for Japan. I will surely sing your praises.”

– Attributed to Keith Fowler POW who visited Japan in Nov 2015, aged 95.

The Friendship Meeting with Japanese citizens played an important part in the change of attitudes in the POWs on their visit to Japan.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROGRAMME

A personal reminiscence of involvement in post-war reconciliation with Japan

My father died on service with the Australian Army in the war against Japan.

In 1959, I visited Japan and by sheer chance was in Tokyo on the lovely spring day when the Crown Prince Akihito, now Emperor of Japan, married Miss Michiko Shoda. Along with millions of people I watched them drive by for the ceremony. I found that Japan, despite the effects of the War, was a well ordered society; and its people hospitable and well mannered. I felt no need to hold any bitterness against these people even though their war had caused my father’s death.

In Australia, however, deep bitterness had developed, particularly when the extent of maltreatment of Australian prisoners of war was revealed. Prime Minister Nobosuke Kishi visited Australia and professed heartfelt sorrow for what happened during the War in his speech to Parliament on 4 December 1957 but it was not well received.

Forty years later, in 1997, I became RSL National President from Major General Digger James. I had been privy to his discussions with Ambassador Kazutoshi Hasegawa (a driving force who later becomes President of the Japan-Australia-NZ Association in Tokyo). I inherited something of a diplomatic impasse over the naming of the Canberra-Nara Peace Park issue which caused ructions within the RSL and the Canberra community. I advocated letting the matter lie for some years, as occurred.

I made a number of visits with groups of former Australian soldiers who had been prisoners of the Japanese during World War II to some infamous sites, including Changi and Hellfire Pass on the Thai-Burma railway. I learnt, with great anguish, about the ill-treatment endured by these men. It struck me that, when talking in a group, many would display a hatred of the Japanese people, which I could well understand. Yet, in talking privately nearly all said that they wanted to forgive, even if they could never forget. Certainly, that was the view I had heard from two famous former POWs, the doctor “Weary” Dunlop and the nurse, Vivienne Bullwinkel.

As the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II approached, I think that the issue that rankled most with former POWs was a perception that authorities in Japan had done little to educate the younger generation of Japanese as to the treatment meted by Japanese imperial forces on their prisoners of war, on native labourers, and others. This led to many frank discussions with successive Japanese Ambassadors in Canberra. Ambassador Masaji Takahashi advised me of the Japanese cabinet’s initiation of the program of reconciliation with former enemies which I heartily endorsed. Then, in the year 2000, the Japanese government invited me and my wife to visit Japan. We were greatly honoured wherever we went in Japan and I had frank meetings with many officials, military officers and historians.

I was pleased to see that following my visit members of the RSL National Executive were also invited to visit Japan starting in 2002. Ambassador Kenzo Oshima and Atsushi Hatakenaka were particularly helpful. The climate of reconciliation seemed to be strengthening and it was pleasing to visits by parties of schoolchildren from Funairi High School in Hiroshima sponsored by Surfers Paradise RSL. I also had the opportunity to speak to Japanese tour groups and exchange students in Cowra and to host a party of Japanese politicians at the RSL's national offices. Finally – a high point – was to see the Japanese Ambassador lay a wreath at the Australian War Memorial on Victory over Japan (VJ) Day.

MAJOR GENERAL PETER R PHILLIPS AO MC, FORMER RSL NATIONAL PRESIDENT
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROGRAMME

The Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme started in April 1997. Its primary aim is to promote mutual understanding between two nations through encouraging post-war reconciliation and friendship by inviting former Australian Prisoners of War (POWs) to Japan. Since its beginning, the programme has invited a total of 120 former POWs and their related personnel for 16 years. During their stay in Japan, they met a number of Japanese people, ranging from primary school students to senior citizens. As can be seen from “Voices of the Participants,” in this report, this programme provided an invaluable opportunity for both sides to spend time in an amicable manner and to show their sincere respect for our past.

Japan and Australia, frequently referred to as “friends of longitude 135 degree east,” has become indispensable partners to each other for peace and stability of the rapidly changing Asia-Pacific region. After World War II, the foundation of the partnership was laid by the signing of Japan-Australia Commerce Agreement in 1957. In 1976 the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation between Japan and Australia, ‘NARA treaty,’ was concluded and played an important role to promote mutual understanding and cooperation, not only in economy and trade, but in all areas. With flourished people-to-people exchanges, there are more than 100 sister-city partnerships between Japan and Australia, and many citizens of both countries visit each other for various reasons including sightseeing, study and business.

Although the relationship between the two countries has developed and multifaceted as mentioned above, it is undeniable that there are certain amount of Australian citizens who hold particular sentiments toward Japan due to former POWs’ experiences during World War II. Many of the Allied Forces soldiers were captured as POWs by the imperial army and the navy during World War II; and this has given the most common grounds for vigorous criticism against Japan, not only from Australia but from other European and Asian countries.

In Australia, people remember World War II as the war in which many POWs lost their lives. They should have returned home safe at the war’s end, but they did not make it. It is said that among all Australian soldiers who participated in the war, 27,073 soldiers lost their lives, with the death rate being approximately 2.7%. On the other hand, as many as 22,000 Australians were taken by the imperial army and the navy as POWs, and 8,031 or 36% of them lost their lives. In other words, death rate among POWs was over 13 times higher than in the battlefields.

For the Australian people, former POWs’ stories must not be forgotten when they recall the history of World War II. Many former POWs who survived and returned to Australia reveals their harsh lives at prison camps, and their experiences were widely shared with a large number of the Australian populations, including post-war generations who do not know the war.
On the other hand, while we the Japanese remember and feel deep condolence to the war dead of World War II, there has been low media coverage over the former POWs' stories in Japan, and there have been limited opportunities for the Japanese to be considerate of the former POWs' feelings. This difference between the Australian and the Japanese attitude towards former POWs had become deep cause for mistrust and particular feeling towards the modern day Japan on the part of the Australian people. They are distasteful of the mistreatment by the former soldiers of the imperial army and the navy. In addition to this, we found that they feel disappointed at today's Japanese people with little interest in what happened to their fellow Australians during the war.

With the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme, many Japanese citizens were given valuable opportunities to listen to former POWs' experiences and renew their understanding of peace built upon their sacrifices. On the other hand, as shown in the report, by visiting present day Japan, former POWs had a chance to meet the Japanese people undoubtedly different from what they saw at the POW camps. Such feelings on the both sides provided an important opportunity to promote post-war reconciliation and deepen mutual understanding.

The sufferings former POWs endured are beyond description. We imagine that it must have taken considerable courage and determination for former POWs to visit Japan. We have to bear in mind that they had to overcome their feelings of resentment and repulsion against the country, which gave them extreme harsh treatment. When we witness the former POWs' determination not to make what happened in the past become a source of discord, and their fervent wish to safeguard peace in a future-oriented manner, we feel deep respect for former POWs' sincere attitude towards overcoming the past and moving forward towards peace.

The Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme played a significant role in facilitating reconciliation and mutual understanding between the citizens of Japan and Australia. This would undoubtedly constitute a more solid basis for partnership between two nations. However, even if we achieved a certain degree of success at some stage, this cannot last forever, as it will be continuously challenged by time and changing circumstances. Our sustained efforts are required, and every one of us must keep engaging in that pursuit.

TAKAYUKI NAGANO, PH.D, PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, CHAIRPERSON, DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM & TRANSNATIONAL STUDIES, DOKKYO UNIVERSITY
This year marks the 75th anniversary since 1942, when major battles between Japan and Australia took place during World War II. To commemorate these events, memorial services have been held throughout Australia. I myself had opportunities to attend a commemoration ceremony for the bombing in Darwin in February as well as the one for the Battle of the Coral Sea which was held at the Department of Defence in Canberra in May this year. I received magnanimous messages of reconciliation from many Australians during these ceremonies. This renewed my awareness that Japan and Australia were able to overcome the past together and that their relationship has matured to the point where they can turn the past experiences into a positive force to further deepen their ties. I thus renewed my determination to further enhance those ties between Japan and Australia.

The Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Programme played a significant role in nurturing this spirit of reconciliation. Under the programme, many former POWs, their family members and associates travelled to Japan, where they witnessed the Japan of today firsthand. The experiences and impressions of these visits are elaborated in the report. I myself am convinced that the programme furthered the reconciliation between Japan and Australia and made great contribution to the formation of a new view toward Japan for the former POWs and people concerned. I would therefore like to express my profound and deep gratitude to the former POWs and their families who visited Japan as well as all the parties concerned, and to the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL) for all of its efforts to realize this programme. I would also like to extend my warmest gratitude to all those on the Japanese side who assisted the groups on their visits.

We shall never forget that our country inflicted immeasurable damage and suffering on Australia and other relevant countries during the war. Taking full account of this history, Japan has built a free, democratic, and peaceful nation after the war with the determination never to repeat the devastation of war. During the course of the post-war period, Japan and Australia deepened cooperation in a wide range of areas and established “Special Strategic Partnership,” which we enjoy today. I wish to re-emphasize that in the background to these developments exists the spirit of reconciliation at the grassroots level between our countries.

While commemorative events are to be held both in Japan and Australia to conclude the present programme, the two countries, which together achieved post-war reconciliation, will continue to strive to ensure that the spirit of the Grassroots Exchange Programme is passed on to the next generation and endeavour to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the region and the international community.

SEPTEMBER 2017: SUMIO KUSAKA
AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF JAPAN TO AUSTRALIA
Since the commencement the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Program in 1997 the POW Friendship program has assisted not only with reconciliation but has also provided participants with the opportunity to seek solace on their return.

To date there has been 120 former POWs and their families visit Japan as part of the Japan-Australia Grassroots Exchange Program. Some of their insights are captured in the Voices from Japan and Australia.

The program was structured to ensure all former POWs (and their families) received an apology from a high-level member of the Japanese government. POWs were also encouraged to undertake visits of personal and memorial significance and commemoration.

Each visit enables the POWs (and their families) the opportunity to share their stories, experiences with a range of delegates from Japan. This program has provided both the RSL and the Japanese Government with an opportunity to educate the next generation on the importance of exploring war history and striving for reconciliation post-war time efforts.

SEPTEMBER 2017: ROBERT DICK
NATIONAL PRESIDENT, RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA