

COWRA CEREMONY

Japan sends peace note to war dead

By a Staff Correspondent

A representative of the Japanese Foreign Office stood in the sunshine at Cowra yesterday and read a message to 522 Japanese war dead.

The representative, Mr. Ki Nemoto, was attending the dedication of the war cemetery for Japanese who were killed in Australia during the war.

The message was from the Japanese Government.

In his message to the fallen, Mr. Nemoto told them of the new Japan and the spirit of peace and goodwill which now existed between their fatherland and Australia.

Their sacrifice had not been in vain and now, because of the friendship between the countries, they were able at last to find a resting place and their souls might return to their ancestors.

Simultaneously with the Cowra cemetery, a memorial was dedicated at the Yasakuni Shrine in Tokyo, by comrades of 247 Japanese prisoners-of-war at Cowra who died on the night of August 4-5, 1944, when about 900 prisoners tried to break out of the camp.

Stone lantern at entrance

The Cowra war cemetery

The Cowra war cemetery was constructed for the Japanese Government by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which arranged for the remains of 275 Japanese dead to lie beside the 247 originally buried there.

A small stone lantern at the entrance to the cemetery was presented to the cemetery by the president of the huge Mitsui industrial empire, Mr. T. Mizukami. Such lanterns are usually placed in front of a Japanese temple or shrine.

A black granite pedestal surrounded by a low brick wall is the central piece in the cemetery. It was brought from Japan and bears Japanese characters which mean "The graves of Japanese who died in war time, September, 1964."

Former Japanese prisoners in Australia contributed funds for the establishment of a plantation of Australian and Japanese shrubs in order to console the souls of their wartime

the souls of their wartime comrades.

Cowra proud of trust

The Japanese buried at Cowra lie beneath concrete slabs with bronze plates telling the name, age, and date of death of each. In some cases the full details were not known, in other cases there are no details at all. Some Japanese airmen shot down over Darwin in 1942 are buried with no details

available other than the date of death.

To begin yesterday's ceremony the Cowra Municipal Band played first the National Anthem and then, as the flag of Japan was raised slowly to half-mast, the Japanese anthem.

After Mr. Nemoto had dedicated the cemetery he and the Japanese Ambassador to Australia, Mr. Saburo Ohta, placed wreaths.

The Mayor of Cowra, Alderman A. J. Oliver, said it was fitting that the dead of the two countries should lie side by side surrounded by the peace of the Australian countryside.

Prisoners defied commands

Not far from the Japanese cemetery is the Australian war cemetery. Striking white marble headstones each carry the crest of the A.I.F. and the name, number, and rank of the servicemen buried there, as well as the date on which he died. The cemetery was dedicated on November 11 last — Remembrance Day.

In the Australian cemetery are the remains of some of the men who died on the night the Japanese attempted to smash their way from the camp.

Yesterday Mr. Ohta laid wreaths on their graves.

On the night of August 4-5, 1944, about 900 of the 1,104 Japanese prisoners-of-war at Cowra attempted a mass escape. Soon after midnight they attacked the barbed wire fences surrounding the camp. The Australian guards fired into the mob when they defied orders to return to their

quarters when they were ordered to return to their quarters.

Vital part thrown away

Suddenly, in the glare of searchlight trained on the scene, a mob of Japanese was seen about to break through the wire toward an unmanned Vickers machine-gun.

Pte. R. Jones of Crookwell and Pte. G. B. Hardy of Willoughby raced for the gun, battling with the milling Japanese to get there first.

Jones and Hardy won their race and opened fire. But the Japanese pressed them on all sides.

When the two men saw that they were about to be overwhelmed they removed a vital part of the gun and hung it over the fence

into the long grass. The Japanese then set about them with knives and clubs and battered them to death.

When the prisoners attempted to use the gun themselves it jammed before firing a shot.

Jones and Hardy were awarded the George Cross.





The Japanese flag flutters at half-mast over Australian soil at the Japanese War Cemetery at Cowra yesterday. In the centre is the Director, Pacific Region, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Brigadier A. E. Brown. Partly concealed beside him is Mr. Ki Nemoto of the Japanese Foreign Office.

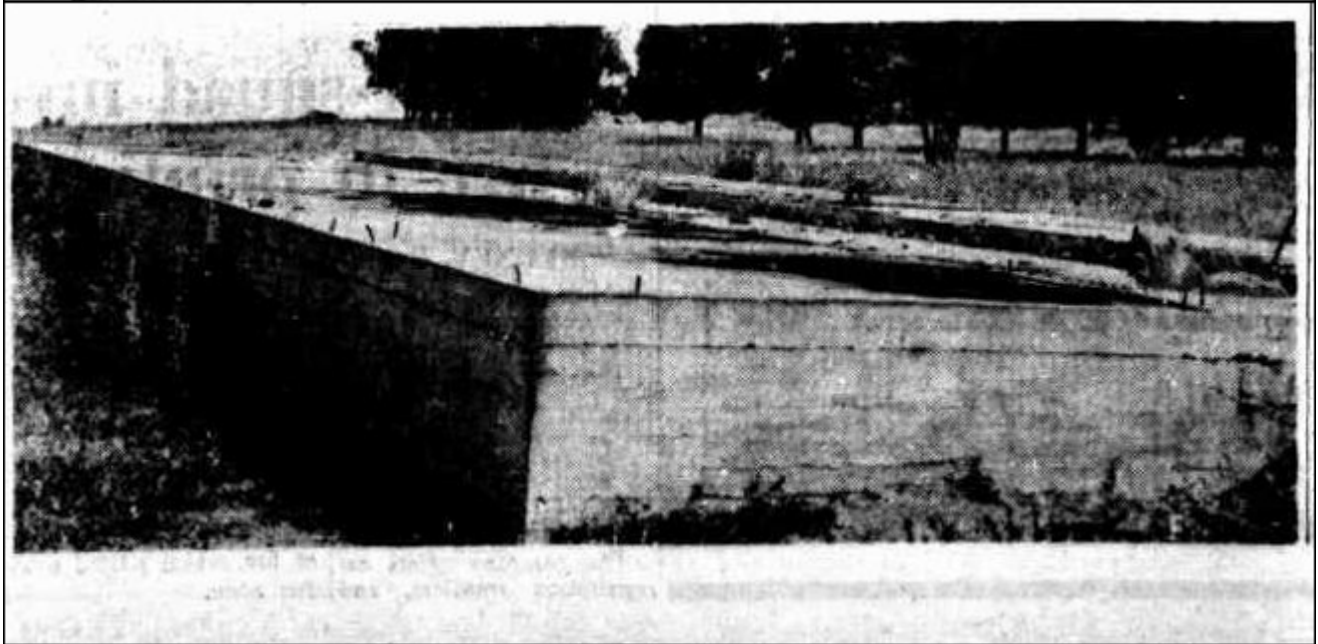


The Japanese Ambassador to Australia, Mr. Saburo Ohta, places a wreath before the obelisk at the Japanese War Cemetery at Cowra yesterday. The characters on the obelisk mean: "The graves of Japanese who died in war time. September, 1964."

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In this paddock 237 men died





Yesterday this paddock near Cowra was a scene of peace. A little more than 20 years ago 234 Japanese prisoners of war and three Australian guards were killed here when 900 prisoners revolted. The attempted break-out occurred on the night of August 4-5, 1944. RIGHT: This concrete block is one of the few remaining signs that the paddock was once a P.O.W. camp.