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HALF A CENTURY OF SILENCE

UNIQUE STORY OF A JAPANESE SUBMARINER IN THE PACIFIC WAR

My name is Michiko Takahashi. I am a young woman 25 years old. At the end of my studies at a University in Kyoto, where I majored in English, I took up a job with a Tourist Bureau. In 1995 I decided to leave Japan and spend six months or more in Australia. The aim was to improve my English which would hopefully help me find an above average job at home as a bi-lingual person and also broaden my outlook. You will soon realise from what I am to tell you just how much my ideas were widened. The knowledge I gained in the Land of the South was to prove to be a golden key to unlock from a source in my family a terrible secret that had been kept for more than half a century, a secret never before revealed to the world.

1995 was a special year for Australians. It was the Year of Remembrance, marking fifty years since the end of the Pacific War. Anyone living in Australia, native or tourist, could not help being exposed to the mass of publicity, functions and parades commemorating the war. For months leading up to Victory in the Pacific Day in August television channels bombarded viewers with documentaries and mini-flashbacks to scenes of wartime, both at home and abroad. They were shown practically every hour of the day. Aside from these, I heard the Australian Prime Minister urging the Government of Japan to apologise for their starting hostilities, for their invasions of other countries, for the horrendous atrocities committed on both civilians and prisoners of war. Truly I was shocked! At school, from Elementary through to Senior High School, we had learned nothing about such things. We were taught only that Japan had been forced to fight the *Dai-Toa-Senso* [Great Asia War], a defensive war, an economic war for the sake of the Co-Prosperity of Asian Nations, and that the war had been won by the U.S.A. and its Allies through the dropping of horrendous life-shattering atomic bombs on our cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Now in Australia I was hearing a different story. I felt shocked. Was it true or not? I had to know.

I began discussing the subject with Chinese, Koreans, Malaysians and other Asians in my Advanced English class in Sydney. They were young like me, but they knew a thousand times more about that war than I did. Their versions were all similar. They told of terribly cruel acts by Japanese soldiers of occupation, of atrocities in Korea, of the 'comfort women' recruited there to satisfy the sexual appetite of Japanese soldiers; of the Rape of Nanking in China where thousands of civilian men, women and children were slaughtered for no reason at all except for the pleasure of sadistic barbarians; of the cruel enslavement of Thais and other Asians, whose Japanese masters had promised liberation from the unjust colonisation of the racist and exploitive Europeans. A Thai student reported from his father that their people had actually welcomed the Japanese as liberators, but in time their saviours turned into oppressors.

One mature-age Indonesian man, however, added that the Japanese did liberate them from their Dutch masters. He also maintained that the expansion by the Japanese into Asia was virtually forced on Japan because of the severe embargos imposed by U.S.A. as part of its plan to eliminate Japan as a competitor in the world economy; that Japan's invasion of Asian countries was intended to cleanse Asia of foreign powers and did ultimately lead to their liberation from the clutches of unwanted British, Dutch and French colonisers. What was the difference, he asked, between the British rule of India and the Japanese occupation of Manchuria? The Europeans, he said, had carved up the world for themselves. The Americans had expanded their territory to Hawaii, Guam, Midway, Samoa and the Philippines, but when the Japanese started to do the same, it was unacceptable. His views, I later learned were different, because, during the war, the Indonesians, unlike other Asians disenchanted with their Japanese liberators, had co-operated well with the Japanese in a bid to rid their islands of their hated Dutch masters and thereby gain independence.

I spoke further about these matters with a few of my teachers. I asked them all sorts of probing questions. They answered me honestly. In most cases, students and teachers alike attached no blame to present-day Japanese like myself for Japan's aggression and oppression, but they all expressed the wish that the people of my country, especially those of my generation, should at least be in a position to recognise the history of the war as it happened and not conceal it, as though it had never occurred.

My thirst for knowledge of the Pacific War became insatiable. I spent most of my spare time at the State Library in Sydney where I delved into scores of books on the subject. My almost daily reading with the aid of my English-Japanese dictionary was a heavy task for me. Of course, I did a lot of skimming, but it meant I was making rapid progress in English. What I was finding out was astounding. I thought to myself: *How little the Japanese of my generation know about these things. It is something they should know.* By now I was not unaware that the Japanese are considered by Europeans as having tunnel vision. I certainly didn't want to be included in this view. I wanted to remove those blinkers and get to know the truth of the matter. Each day my enthusiasm for discovery of the facts grew and grew.

On one occasion an elderly Australian approached me in the foyer of the library to ask me whether I could translate some Japanese for him. His name was Peter Johnson. A retired teacher, he was doing research for a book he was writing on the Pacific War and had unearthed some propaganda leaflets in the Japanese language which needed translation. This I did willingly for him. I learned a lot from the exercise. We became friends and had many discussions. In case you think the English I write is too good for a young Japanese of limited experience, I must explain that all that I have written here has been checked and polished up by my senior friend, Peter. In fact I have included some of his thoughts and reports in this story.

I was fortunate in meeting Peter. He was a true citizen of the world, fair-minded and without any racial prejudice. When I informed him of my very limited education in Japan concerning the Pacific War, he agreed that Japan's aim was ostensibly to free Asia of its European bondage, but in practice only dominated them, that all the occupied Asian countries later reported that, far from being egalitarian, the Japanese had been overbearing, heartless and arrogant. He also claimed that the dropping of the devastating atomic bombs was not the sole reason that Japan surrendered; rather was it the Americans' fire bombing of the cities: the napalm bombs had destroyed the timber homes of millions of civilians, 200 000 of whom died in just one night. Peter ventured to say that while the Japanese military had committed the most heinous atrocities, it was the Japanese civilians who had suffered wholesale massacre by the bombings — which might have been regarded as a war crime had the Japanese won the war. Food for thought.

I learned a lot about Peter Johnson. He had not served in the Pacific War, but had visited Japan several times since. He had learned to speak Japanese to a limited degree without being able to read or write. He had lived for some months with Japanese families. For this reason he had a fair knowledge of the culture of Japan and how the people think and communicate. One significant thing about our way of thinking he described with this odd psychological term — cognitive dissonance. He explained what this meant. It means refusing to accept what you do not wish to believe — in a word, denial. This explanation really struck me like a bolt of lightning. Yes, this was very typical of Japanese thinking. I suppose human beings everywhere prefer the pleasant to the unpleasant and don't want to know about certain things, but I must say that my people are past masters at such avoidance or concealment. We smile when we are inwardly sad. A mother will laugh when she tells how she tragically lost her baby. We are indirect, and delicate subjects are left unsaid. Our language is often called the devious tongue. Foreigners rarely understand our mode of communication. For instance, when we say yes, it does not always mean yes in the European sense, rarely in fact. It means simply yes, I am listening to you, I follow you, I understand, please go on. Many a foreign business man trying to sell to the Japanese wrongly assumes he has clinched a deal because his questions about sales were all greeted with yes. Disappointments generally follow such assumptions.

On this point about refusing to accept what one does not want to know, Peter consoled me with the fact that the American authorities had been warned about the attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7 1941, but just wouldn't believe it, or else just didn't want to believe it. I'll let Peter recount the details of his research on this matter: *As early as 1921 a man named Henry Bywater had written a book called Sea Power in the Pacific in which he described in detail a surprise attack on the United States Fleet at Pearl Harbour, as well as assaults on Guam and the Philippines. Though the American Naval College adopted the book for study, and a strong plan of defence was carried out, it seems that no-one believed that such a thing could ever happen. Early in 1941 the Americans knew that the Japanese were about to wage war, but they believed it would involve an attack on Malaya and even the Philippines — certainly not on Pearl Harbour in Hawaii.*

The Japanese would not be stupid enough, they thought, to strike against the superior industrial might of the U.S.A. They did not realise that the militarists who made the decision to attack the American giant believed the Japanese were a master race destined to rule Asia, the Pacific and perhaps the world. The Japanese believed that their strong spirit and love of country would triumph over the material superiority of the Americans.

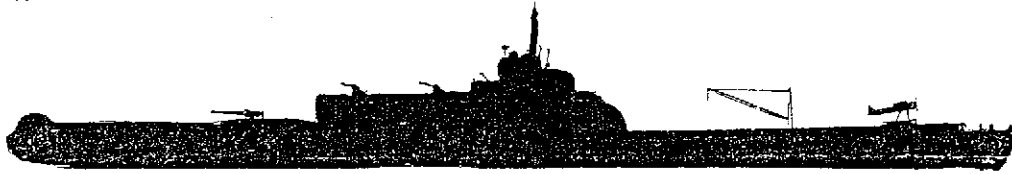
A couple of years before the Pacific War began, the British had broken the Japanese Naval Code known as J-25. Two weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour the code breakers informed Britain's Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, of Admiral Yamamoto's Task Force being prepared to move east, across the Pacific, logically to Pearl Harbour. For his own reasons, namely, his wish to see U.S.A. enter the war Britain was already fighting against the Axis powers, Churchill did not officially inform the Americans of the impending attack. Though there are now no official records of it, the same information was privately passed on to the Americans. It is also claimed that the Americans themselves had by this time broken the J-25 code. The attack by the Japanese on Malaya signalling the start of the Pacific War actually took place a couple of hours before the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour, yet there was no alert at the great naval base. For some inexplicable reason, unless one of cognitive dissonance, the various items of vital information were not acted upon. With their then sense of superiority the Americans didn't believe that the Japanese were capable of striking at so many places at the one time — furthermore, they didn't want to believe it. The inevitable result was death and disaster, the very causes of which governments still zealously wish to conceal.

One day my researcher friend was reading a book [*WHO SANK THE SYDNEY* by Michael Montgomery Cassells 1983] about the mysterious disappearance of an Australian naval vessel and the whole of its crew off the coast of Western Australia in 1941. Peter mentioned it to me. At first it seemed to be of little interest to me, because it happened in November 1941 more than two weeks before Japan began hostilities.

According to Peter: The Australian cruiser "Sydney" had engaged the German Kormoran [an armed merchant ship] in a fierce battle at close range. Both ships were considerably damaged, but it was the German raider which surrendered. The surviving officers and crew had abandoned ship and were in the process of making their way in lifeboats towards the Australian vessel, when a seemingly inexplicable thing took place. The "Sydney" was suddenly struck by a single well-aimed torpedo which set her ablaze. The German survivors saw her drift away. The cruiser disappeared from sight and was never seen again.

Not a single member of the 645 on aboard survived. Not a trace was ever found to indicate what had happened. It remained the greatest mystery in Australian and British naval history. Australian authorities were puzzled. The only eye-witnesses were the survivors from the German vessel Kormoran, who claimed that at that time their sinking ship was definitely not in a position to fire a torpedo. Therefore the lethal blow must have come from a different vessel, yet none had been sighted

— not on the surface, nor in the air. Logically, then, it must have been an unseen vessel, namely one under the surface. A German submarine, no doubt. But had it been so, would not the news of its success have been trumpeted proudly over the Nazi air waves? Such was not the case. One then ventures to ask: Could the unseen submarine have been Japanese? In fact many Australians did ask this very question.



At first it might seem highly unlikely that it was a Japanese submarine, as the Japanese had not begun hostilities against Britain, America and Australia until 18 days after this incident. On the other hand, British readers of the Japanese Naval Code knew full well that the Japanese Naval vessels were at this time already poised to attack and invade many areas in the Pacific. Further, we must remember that Japan had already signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Russia in September 1940 and were learning as much as possible about war strategies from the Germans and were prepared to co-operate with them. Japan never ever worried about the rules of war. On the Yangtze River in China, back in December 1937, war-crazy Japanese planes deliberately sank an U.S. gun-boat and three American tankers. The American flags had been clearly recognisable. The pilots mercilessly strafed the surviving sailors struggling to swim to the shore

The alleged involvement of a Japanese submarine seemed quite improbable to me. After what Peter had made me realise about this cognitive dissonance, I had to admit that I just didn't want to even consider the possibility. I was happy to reject the idea. This Peter said was quite normal. Peter and I had often discussed the various religions of the world and it was clear, to us at least and to thinking people in general, that most of those who feel comfortable with their religious beliefs don't want to think too deeply about them and very few are prepared to hear any argument against them. Australian Christians may regard our ringing of the Happy Bell at a Shinto shrine as pure superstition, yet their ready acceptance of stories of miracles in their Holy Scriptures we look upon as child-like naivety.

Still, the thought about the possibility of the action of a Japanese submarine before the declaration of war remained embedded in my brain. Peter's research continued unabated and he was soon to offer me some further interesting points to consider:

From Berlin Radio on October 29 1941 Nazi Germany's Rear-Admiral Luetzow openly called on its recently acquired Axis partner, Japan, to invade Australia. Just two weeks later on November 15 1941 the Chief of General Staff, Admiral Sugiyama, issued the following order: On suitable occasions the Navy will carry out air strikes and submarine operations in the Australian and Indian Ocean regions. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Kormoran had already made a rendez-vous with a Japanese supply vessel for among the German survivors in lifeboats picked up by Australian military a number of Japanese milk bottles were



found. In the opinion of Australian specialists the *Kormoran* had been co-operating with a Japanese submarine. German records show that no German submarine was in the area.

If the German raider alone had sunk the "Sydney", the "Sydney" was the only warship in history to have been sunk by a merchant ship. When I was a boy at school in 1941, we had a holiday to celebrate the sinking by the "Sydney" of the larger Italian naval ship, the *Bartolomeo Colleoni*. The latter was reputed to be the fastest cruiser in the world. So it is doubtful that an armed merchant ship could take on the "Sydney" and win. Up to this time the raider had sunk only merchant ships and always by treachery, flying the Norwegian flag. While it is true that the German's first salvo hit the bridge of the "Sydney", the "Sydney's" guns had immediately hit the *Kormoran's* engine room, crippling the pumps necessary to extinguish the fires on the ship. The Captain and crew proceeded to abandon ship. At this time the German Captain, Theodor Detmers, stated that the "Sydney" was seen turning behind a smokescreen [probably caused by fire], steering south about 5 knots.

The fact that there were no survivors, is unparalleled among ships of the size of the "Sydney", particularly considering the evidence of German survivors that the "Sydney" had won the battle against the *Kormoran*. Only two empty lifeboats and a Carley float damaged by gunfire were found. A constant search by radio, planes and ships found no further trace of the "Sydney" or its crew. By the way, when the Japanese Naval Force was on its way to make a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour without a declaration of war, it was imperative that it not be detected. Hence it was official policy to sink any ship of any flag which might sight the armada.

Though Japanese submarines had been reported off Broome as early as 1940, Australian authorities would not officially accept the possibility that the "Sydney" had been sunk by a Japanese submarine. Because Australia and Japan were not at hostilities, there was a diplomatic need to cover up any such assertion. There seems to have been a conspiracy of silence about the matter ever since. Nevertheless, during the war it was commonly believed by members of Australian Armed Forces that it was the Japanese, not the Germans, who had sunk the "Sydney". After all, it was the Japanese way. Had they not insidiously destroyed the Russian Fleet in 1904 without a declaration of war? Of course, they would have kept quiet about their actions. Sensible but deceitful. In the Samurai tradition lying to the outside world as opposed to lying to their master was regarded as intelligent behaviour.

What happened over fifty years ago now seemed to mean something to me. Why, you may ask, was I especially interested in this particular event? The reason was that my grandfather had been in the Japanese Navy at that time. Though he had never talked about the war with me, I knew from my parents that he had served on submarines and had lost his right hand in an explosion. It was a remote connexion, but it intrigued me. I read through the book, *Who Sank the Sydney*, and discussed the mystery with my library friend at great lengths.

I was so fascinated with the subject that I decided that I must discuss things with my own people, and, who better than my grandfather who, since the death of my grandmother, had lived in our home in Kyoto. You see, it is our custom that the eldest son in a family has the responsibility for looking after aged parents. That is why I knew my grandfather so well. In a letter to him I wrote down all the details of the affair in the Indian Ocean and the alleged participation of a Japanese submarine. I asked whether he had seen service in the Indian Ocean, whether he had ever heard of this incident or accusation and whether he thought it was even possible. I waited anxiously for a reply.

Having no reply after three weeks, I wrote once more, discreetly asking in typically Japanese style whether my recent letter had arrived or not. Ten days later I received a letter from grandfather asking me about my health, urging me to take care of myself, describing the beautiful autumn weather and finally — just one sentence in reply to my vital question. He merely said that, during the war, he had been on duty in the Pacific Ocean. That was all! In reading this with understandable disappointment, I think I suffered a reverse culture shock. I had almost forgotten the Japanese way. I had become used to the open, direct communication of the Australians. At that moment I found the Japanese way so very frustrating. Grandfather hadn't mentioned my two recent letters. I even began to suspect that Grandfather, instead of revealing, was deliberately concealing something. He hadn't directly answered the question about being in the Indian Ocean. He had merely stated that he was in the Pacific. He had avoided mention of any knowledge of the affair. He had not even denied the possibility of such a thing being possible. In brief, he had put me off. It was obvious that he didn't want to know about it. That naturally increased my curiosity. In the face of such reluctance, mere grandchildren would never pursue the question. In my case, it was different. Though I did not immediately pursue the matter, I felt I must find a way. After all, my thinking now belonged to two worlds and I just had to find a balance for my own peace of mind. I waited.

I waited until my six months stay was over. Much to the joy of my family I returned to my home in Kyoto. It was wonderful to see the ancient capital of Japan once more, though I must admit I suffered a touch of culture shock, having to return to the traditional form of indirect communication.

I secretly planned a campaign to find out more from my grandfather about his experiences in the war. I knew the task would be extremely difficult, since grandfather belonged to a generation of men instilled with the code of honour of the *bushido*, the way of the samurai, the chivalrous but fierce warriors of old. My approach had to be extremely subtle. It would require a great deal of patience. I spent a lot of time with my grandfather relating stories of my stay in Australia. At first, I avoided any mention of the Pacific War. Otherwise I haunted the city libraries and read what I could find about the subject with particular reference to naval operations. Eventually I slipped into the conversation with Grandfather little things about *Australia Remembers*. Grandfather listened attentively without comment.

I talked about my senior library friend, Peter Johnson, of his kindness to me. I made mention of his experience of and respect for Japanese culture. Grandfather seemed pleased. I read to him Peter's words, not mine, about the sinking of the "Sydney". He listened with interest but without comment. I talked about the generally benevolent attitude in Australia towards the Japanese. I quoted Peter's words: *Politicians — not people — make wars*. I carefully asked Grandfather little questions about the war. He gave some brief answers, but added. *We don't like to talk about unpleasant things like war*, he said. *It is exactly the same in Australia*, I replied. *Most of those who went through the war, don't want to talk about it*.

Grandfather was typical of Japanese men. Consciously or subconsciously they like to follow the code of the old Samurai warriors. They like to be strong; they want to be noble; they like to be wise; they like to enjoy high status and never be put down. To lose face is the greatest shame for them. To-day, if a foreign tourist is in trouble, a man will generally hope that he will not be asked for directions, for fear that he won't understand the foreign tongue, usually English, in case he loses face. If he is approached, he will do one of two things: either he will ignore the person, just as though he didn't hear or see; or else he will give some reply, whether it is right or wrong. Peter Johnson tells me from his experience that the best way for a foreigner to ask directions is to approach a woman or a girl. Unlike the anxious male, the female has nothing to lose and always presents a bright helpful attitude.

There is another factor which dwells in the Japanese psyche. I speak of *on* or *giri*. These words describe what you might call moral obligation. It is a sense of honour or duty, like the eldest son looking after his parents when they are old. If, for example, there is any scandal or breach of propriety attached to a member of parliament, he is morally forced to resign his position immediately. A Japanese who assassinates a politician in his home, might even apologise to the victim's wife for having made a mess in the process. *Giri* is also a sense of duty and loyalty, especially in the military forces. The suicide pilots or human bombs during the war were mostly young University students motivated by the traditional feeling of obligation and gratitude towards their family and native-land. It was a noble death in a worthy, albeit hopeless cause. As you might well know, military people who believed they had failed in their duty, committed suicide by *hara-kiri* [disembowelment]. This sense of duty is something handed down from the days of the Samurai warriors and most Japanese men, especially those of the older generation, like to believe they have the virtues of these type of knights of old. I could see Grandfather grappling between these inherited attributes and his possible desire to be frank with his beloved grand daughter. I had to leave off my probing and further bide my time.

Some weeks later, however, I made a fresh approach. It was the day after Grandfather had turned 80. I talked with him about life and longevity. He expressed his gratitude for such a long life. Without mentioning the war, he even compared his life with the relatively short lives of so many of his contemporaries. He went on to express his doubt that he had much more time on earth.

I said with the utmost sincerity that I wanted to know as much about his life as possible so that it could be passed on to the family that I one day hoped to have. He looked at me with loving eyes and surprised me with the utterance of one word—*senso*—the war. He paused in thought. I waited patiently. Slowly, but surely the breakthrough had come! I needed no notebook or tape to record what he proceeded to tell me. It became engraved indelibly in my memory. Just the same I did use a tape recorder which I had by me, one on which I regularly played traditional Japanese music for grandfather's benefit

I can tell you now. In my youth Japan was a military society. Service in the Armed Forces had been compulsory since 1870. It was 1936. I had turned 20., which was the age when young men had to begin serving in the armed forces. Later, the age was reduced to 19, then to 18. I chose to serve in the Navy, largely I think, because of my admiration for the great and wise Admiral Yamamoto, who, by the way, did not want Japan to attack the U.S.A. For many years the government had been making every effort to modernise its armed forces. It had been importing Rolls Royce aeroplane engines and rangefinders from England so that our designers could copy them. Visits to Nazi Germany brought back the latest information on building and equipping tanks, warships and submarines. Japan was building large numbers of submarines. Our submarine fleet was third in the world after Russia and Italy, but technologically far in advance of both these European powers. We were told, and it was true, that by 1941 the Japanese Navy was more powerful and more modern than the combined fleets of both Britain and America in the Pacific. I remember a great day in November 1940 when the Emperor reviewed the Fleet at Yokohama. There were 600 000 tons of ships and over 500 planes.



一郎と戦友たち

Grandfather (centre) with colleagues at gunnery practice 1936. From his parents' album.

At this point, Grandfather stopped and stared into space. I believed that he might not go on. I took a risk and touched him on his only hand. He responded with a nod and started to talk again. This time the words began to flow without effort. The floodgates were at last opening. Once he got going, he appeared to be enjoying the fact that his memory of long ago was so good. He seemed to be relishing the recall of life in his prime. I furtively turned the tape recorder on to the record mode. Whether grandfather was aware of this, I am not sure. At any rate he didn't ever mention it. His thoughts were plunged deep into the past.

Yes, I remember my youth so very well. How proudly we wore our uniform in those early days! How hard we worked at training! I eventually volunteered to go into the submarine service which was regarded as an elite group. The crews of all submarines were volunteers who were bound together by an indomitable spirit. I was assigned to an I-class submarine.

My generation had been reared to revere the Emperor. We looked upon him as a living God. Yes, we believed it was beautiful and glorious to die for the Emperor. Our daily chant I can never forget: "Whether I float as a corpse under the waters or sink beneath the grass of the mountain, I willingly die for the Emperor". Obedience was absolute and commands were never questioned. One of our Royal Princes, Fushimi, was also in the submarine service. That added so very much to our pride and loyalty.

We were constantly reminded by lectures and films that we were not inferior to the European, rather superior to him, that one day we would prove our superiority. We were taught that the Europeans, especially the Americans were devils trying to stifle our trade and exploit all Asians. Revere the Emperor — repel the barbarian was our watchword. When the war ended, we in the services were shattered. In its two and a half thousand years of history our homeland had never been invaded; we had never been defeated. Men, women and children had been trained to resist the invader — on the beaches, on the streets, in the fields. When surrender came, it was a bitter pill for us to swallow, but one we could accept because it was the Emperor's decree. The Emperor informed us that we would have to endure the unendurable, suffer the insufferable. Many commanders and militarists committed hara-kiri. We all believed the American devils would come to our shores to enslave the men, rape the women and bring up the children in foreign ways. We were astounded that such did not happen — just the opposite — we were treated humanely. It is a fact that, in the early years of occupation, around the time your father was born, the most popular name for new-born Japanese babies was MacArthur, after the American General [Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Occupation Forces] who retained our Emperor and gave us democratic government and freedom for all citizens. He also gave our women the vote for the first time in our history — but that wasn't very popular with us men at the time. s*

* [It seemed that, at this stage, MacArthur was more popular with the Japanese than with he was with the Australians! — Peter Johnson]

In the late 1930s we were constantly told that war was inevitable. Japan was being strangled by the ABCD cartel (American British Chinese Dutch). They would not allow us even one drop of oil. In the early years we carried out exercises in the Inland Sea, around Japan and off the coast of China and South-east Asia. We worked with a will and were enthusiastic for war. Early in 1941 we were in the Marianas and the Caroline Islands in the Pacific. In mid 1941 we left our base in Indo-China bound for the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. We headed south towards the Australian coast and into the Indian Ocean. As an ordinary member of the crew I was not privileged to any secret information about our plans, but we were all informed that, with America and its embargos on Japan, we must be prepared for war.

Here I must make a confession. As young men highly trained for a task, we were all longing to put such training into action. No doubt soldiers of any nation experience this feeling. If action meant killing the enemy, that belonged to war. What is more, we believed we would be fighting for justice in an economic world set against our interests. We did not think of the enemy as a person like ourselves, only of our duty to fight and win for the Emperor and the beloved homeland.

Before we were at war with America, we were firm allies with the Germans, and when they failed to persuade us to attack Russia from the east, they encouraged us to strike south, calling for an invasion of Australia. We were also influenced by the overwhelming successes of the Germans on all fronts and many of us thought that if the Axis powers were to conquer the world, we should get in for our share in the Asia and Pacific regions. At this point Grandfather took a long pause. I waited patiently, feeling I was on the brink of a unique discovery. He went on.

It is true that on November 19 1941 we were off the coast of Western Australia. We were then witness to a great naval battle between a German and an Australian ship, rather should I say witness to the end of that battle, when the German ship was ablaze and when the crew were abandoning ship. When I say we, I mean the officers who viewed the affair above through the periscope. The information was passed onto us like the reporting of the progress of a baseball match.

What a position we were in. The gunfire had ceased. The Australian cruiser, though badly hit, had won the battle. We were not supposed to be a player in this event, just a chance observer. Nevertheless, our Captain, for whom we had the deepest respect, must have come to a decision to participate. I believe the decision was based upon two things. One was that our country was already in partnership with Germany. The second was that we were itching for action. Why should we not help our partner Germany? The "Sydney" was a sitting target. One well aimed torpedo would finish her. Nobody would be any the wiser. The decision was made. The torpedo was fired from our vessel and the Australian cruiser, mortally struck, drifted ablaze helplessly into the night. We shadowed its progress, until it was well away from the scene of the battle. As the vessel listed and began to sink, the surviving members of the crew were taking to the lifeboats and rafts. We surfaced and manned the guns. With deck gun and machine guns we sought out the life rafts and slaughtered every living soul in sight.

Our order was to see that there was not a single survivor. If anyone lived to tell the story, it would have jeopardised Japan's secret plans for attacks on Asia and Pearl Harbour. We were, of course, not yet at war with the United States and Australia. All the next day we searched for wreckage and proceeded to sink it or fire it.

At this point grandfather drew a deep breath and halted his narration. He asked for a glass of juice, which I soon provided, trying not to show the fear I entertained that he might not resume his story. I sat by patiently. I knew instinctively that I must not prompt him. To my relief he decided to go on. His memory of the distant past continued to open up. I realised that he was finally releasing something that had been imprisoned for so long, something that had been bursting to be free.

I was a member of the gun crew. Only those who have been submariners can know the physical and mental strain of being confined under water in another world. What a relief to be on deck and to get into action. I just did my duty and at the time, I thought of the action only as my duty. The Captain announced that we had dealt with an enemy of Japan's ally. We experienced no conflict of conscience. We actually rejoiced. After all, we had been taught to hate the Australians as well as the Americans. Australia's White Immigration Policy was proof enough that it was a country of discrimination against us Asians. It was also common knowledge that our strategy was always to strike first against the enemy and strike hard. We had been ready for months, just waiting for the signal to attack. Of course, since this action preceded a declaration of war, it was imperative that no-one should know of it. We, who were 100% loyal to our Emperor, were all sworn to secrecy. From that day to this, not even after the end of the war, has anyone ever revealed what happened that night. In a couple of weeks hostilities had begun with the attack on Pearl Harbour. The success of that unprecedented surprise raid and the invasions in South-East Asia was much celebrated by all Japanese. The easy capture of Singapore lifted our status immeasurably. We were exultant. We had shown our superiority. To be sure, we felt invincible.

We continued to sink many enemy ships. Our submarine seemed to lead a charmed life, but in late January 1943 we were diverted from our normal task to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. At a crucial time when our transports could not get through to positions our troops held on the island, our submarines were called upon to carry urgently needed supplies and reinforcements. It was a dangerous business surfacing right in the middle of a war zone. In so doing, our I-I was intercepted by two New Zealand frigates and blown to pieces. All of our officers and crew, save six who were on deck, went down with the vessel. Again, grandfather paused for some minutes. The pain of this recollection was obviously severe. He had lost comrades with whom he had trained and fought for years, in whose company he had eaten and slept in cramped quarters on long arduous patrols. In the meantime, I could change the tape without his even knowing. Myself, I was experiencing mixed feelings — exhilaration at the unfolding of a seemingly unique secret from the past — sadness in the reminder

how horrible war is, how it sets one human being against another. Somehow Grandfather picked up the thread of his story.

There we were struggling in the water. An American plane came over and machine-gunned us mercilessly. This was a common practice. They hated us as much as we hated them and they knew full well that our soldiers and sailors would never surrender. Only three of us made it to the shore. We were all wounded. I was one of the lucky ones, though I had the lower part of my right arm blown off. One of my surviving comrades died some days later. The other one recovered and eventually returned to duty. Whether he survived the war, I do not know, though I did make enquiries to no avail. I was sent home and, on recovery, assigned to service in naval records in Tokyo. That's how I managed to survive the war. All the naval ratings and pilots of my era that I knew were killed. I never knew whether the "Sydney" incident was in the records there in Tokyo, but I do know that just before our country surrendered in 1945, we were ordered to destroy all records. There was quite a bonfire.

As far as I know, I am the only living survivor from our submarine. So I am the only one, I believe, who still knows what happened to the "Sydney" that night. I did my duty as ordered, but ever since peace came, I have looked back on our action with some regret and question the decision made by our Japanese Commander. I have nursed this secret for nearly fifty four years now. I have never told anyone but you. I didn't ever want to tell anybody. I have struggled against making this revelation. — but now aged 80, in my declining months or days, I have chosen to tell you — only you, dear grand daughter. In so doing, I feel a weight lifted from my mind. I feel better prepared for death. I shall speak of it no more.

Michiko Takahashi

Kyoto

Japan

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NOTE TO READERS:

The publication of *HALF A CENTURY OF SILENCE*, with its sensational revelations, has been made possible only under strict conditions prescribed by Michiko Takahashi of Japan, namely, that it may not appear in print in her native land while her grandfather was still alive, and that there must remain complete confidentiality concerning the true identity of herself and her grandfather as well as that of her Australian researcher friend, Peter Johnson, who basically put the story together in Australia. The names Michiko Takahashi and Peter Johnson which appear in *HALF A CENTURY OF SILENCE*, are pseudonyms. The story was submitted for publication by "Peter Johnson".