



Japanese Bombing of Sydney

Location: Eastern Suburbs, Sydney

During World War II, Australia was targeted for an invasion by the Japanese. Though a full scale invasion never eventuated, Darwin was attacked and Sydney came under limited fire from Japanese submarines in 1942. Japanese submarine I-25 arrived in the Sydney area on Saturday 14 February 1942. The searchlights in Sydney could clearly be seen from the bridge of I-25. Lieutenant Commander Tagami then took I-25 to a position 100 miles south east of Sydney. A number of days of rough swell prevented an immediate launch of the "Glen" float plane carried aboard the sub which stayed submerged during the day and came back to the surface at night.

Finally on Monday 16 February 1942, Tagami agreed with his Executive Officer Lieutenant Tatsuo Tsukudo that the "Glen" could be launched. 30 year old Warrant Flying Officer Nobuo Fujita (1911 - 30 September 1997) readied himself for a reconnaissance flight over Sydney Harbour in the "Glen". Fujita was a graduate of the Kasumigaura Navy Air Corps. Lieutenant Tatsuo Tsukudo supervised the assembly and launch of the "Glen". He planned the take off time such that after an hour's flight over Sydney and its suburbs it would head back for I-25 just after the sun rose at 6.32 am. As it was then an hour's flying time between I-25 and Sydney, this ensured the "Glen" found the submarine without any problems. The assembly of the aircraft began at 3.30 am on Tuesday 17 February 1942. An hour later the "Glen" was ready for take off. After it was launched along the 20 metre long catapult, the "Glen" climbed slowly in the direction of Sydney, travelling at about 90 knots.

He arrived in Sydney over the low cliffs at La Perouse at a height of 2,500 metres and travelled

across Botany Bay on a course of 270 degrees. He swung north west and headed for Parramatta with the city and the harbour on the right. Fujita had to lose height to about 1,000 metres to avoid some clouds. This gave him a very clear view of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. He counted 23 ships at anchor in the harbour including a large 10,000 ton three funnel warship, 2 destroyers and 5 submarines. As the early rays of the sun were almost ready to appear, he started to become uneasy and fully expected air raid sirens to sound and the anti-aircraft guns to open fire. But he continued undetected crossing North Head and began the return flight to submarine I-25. When he reached the anticipated rendezvous area he could not find the submarine. Fujita eventually spotted I-25 on the horizon and landed safely.

More Japanese reconnaissance flights over Sydney Harbour were conducted on 23rd and 30th May 1942, prior to the entry and attack by Japanese mini subs on Sydney Harbour a week later. Whilst the story of entry of Japanese mini submarines into Sydney Harbour in June 1942 is widely known, few people today are aware of the shelling of Sydney's eastern suburbs by the subs and the damage they caused to numerous houses.



The incident began just after midnight on 8 June 1942 when Japanese submarine I-24 was travelling at periscope depth about 15km south west of the Macquarie Light near Sydney. I-24 surfaced and pointed its deck gun towards Sydney. Commander Hanabusa gave his target instructions to gunnery officer Yusaburo Morita to aim directly at the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

They were travelling in a north west direction towards the coast when Morita fired his deck gun on the bow of I-24. He fired 10 shells within 4 minutes. Most of the shells came down in Rose Bay, Woollahra and Bellevue Hill, some fell short into the harbour and the ocean. I-24 had finished firing by the time searchlights on the shore had been turned on. About 10 seconds after I-24 fired its last shell, the coastal batteries were ready to fire.

Damage caused by the shells was minimal as only one actually exploded. The reason appears to be that the Japanese were using armour-piercing rounds intended to hit steel plated ships.

A shell landed in Bradley Avenue, Bellevue Hill destroying the back rooms of a house owned by Mrs. M. McEachern. It also damaged the house next door. Again, this shell did not explode. Mrs. McEachern was in bed at the time but not asleep. She heard a shell whistle by and then a thud. She heard two more shells whistle by. The third and final shell was the one that hit her house. Another shell hit the gutter outside a small two storey grocery store run by Mr & Mrs. S. J. & Alice Richards on the corner of Small and Fletcher Streets, Woollahra. It shattered all the windows of the sandstone building.



The bombed shop on the corner of Small and Fletcher Streets, Woollahra

After the shell attack, Alice and her two children hid under the bed. When they eventually came down stairs they found their shop was wrecked. When repairs were carried out, the front door of the shop was bricked in and it remains that way today. One of the shells went through the double brick wall just below the gutter line of Grantham Flats near the corner of Manion Avenue and Iluka Streets, Rose Bay.

Mr Ernest Hirsch and his family lived in Grantham Flats. He was in his bed on the top floor

when the shell hit. It skidded across the floor in his mother's room and went through another two internal walls, coming to rest on the stairs where it was discovered by Air Raid Warden Harry Woodward.

Fortunately the bomb had failed to explode. His mother was covered in broken bricks and her bed was damaged by falling debris. She escaped unharmed. Her son suffered a fractured foot when he was buried under a pile of broken masonry. Ernest's wife and 18 month old son were in another room and were not injured. The unexploded shell was carried by Mr Woodward and two others to nearby Dangar Park where it was temporarily buried. The Navy demolition team recovered it later for detonation.

Other shells fell at 9 Bunyula Road, Bellevue Hill, 68 Streatfield Road, Bellevue Hill, 67 Balfour Road, Rose Bay, 1 Simpson Street, Bondi, Olola Avenue, Vaucluse and Yallambee Flats, 33 Plumer Road, Rose Bay. The only shell that exploded was the one that fell outside Yallambee Flats. It demolished part of a house. A woman sleeping on an enclosed verandah was slightly injured by flying glass. About 12 women lived in the flats. The warning sirens eventually sounded about 10 minutes after the last shell had been fired. The walled in doorway of the grocery shop in Small Street, Woollahra is the only remaining evidence of the shelling.

Bombing Sydney was not Nobuo Fujita's only significant wartime exploit. Fujita was on board I-25 during the attack on Pearl Harbour, where the I-25 and three other submarines patrolled a line 193 km north of Oahu. Fujita's "Glen" seaplane did not function properly this time, and he was unable to participate in the reconnaissance mission planned before the attack. Seven months after his bombing raid over Sydney, he flew a floatplane from the long-range submarine aircraft carrier I-25, and conducted the only wartime aircraft-dropped bombing on the continental United States of America, which became known as the Lookout Air Raid. Using incendiary bombs, his mission was to start massive forest fires in the Pacific Northwest near the city of Brookings, Oregon with the objective of drawing the U.S. military's resources away from the Pacific Theater. The strategy, which Fujita himself suggested, was also used in the Japanese fire balloon campaign.

Fujita continued as an Imperial Japanese Navy pilot, mainly in reconnaissance duties, until 1944, when he was transferred to the training of kamikaze pilots. After the war he opened a hardware store in Ibaraki Prefecture, and later worked at a company making wire.

(Source: visitsydneyaustralia.com.au)