

Letter from Kanji

To my dear friends who support the development of friendly relations between Japan and Canada,

First

The international situation is troubled, including in Ukraine and the Middle East, and we can afford no further delay in adopting measures against global warming..

In the middle of this, in 2023, Japan held the G7 presidency and held 15 G7 ministerial meetings, including the Hiroshima Summit, in which foreign ministers and finance ministers also took part. The G7 has come together to provide guidance on issues facing the international community, including regional affairs, economic security, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, the environment, energy, food, global health, and AI.

This year marks the 95th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Canada, and our relations are progressing from politics and security to business and even culture. We are gradually implementing the Japan-Canada Action Plan for contributing to a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The Royal Canadian Navy has dispatched three frigates and other ships to monitor North Korea's "ship-to-ship transfers" and conduct joint exercises based on the United Nations Charter. This is the second largest deployment of assets after the United States. Mary Ng, Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, and Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, also visited Japan leading a "Team Canada" delegation of 250 businesspeople from over 150 Canadian companies. This is the largest trade mission in the history of Japan-Canada relations. We hope that this will lead to future business partnerships.

I recently had a business trip to the Province of Manitoba and met with newly sworn-in Premier Wab Kinew. Japan is Manitoba's largest importer of pork, wheat and canola. Looking towards achieving net-zero by 2050, Japanese companies are also showing their interest in critical materials and hydrogen from Manitoba.

On the other hand, I feel that today's extremely good Japan-Canada relationship was built thanks to the beliefs and passions of various people. Japan and Canada, a self-governing dominion of the British Empire, fought together in World War I due to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, but in World War II they were enemies. However, Japan and Canada have overcome our pasts, and since the war, Japan-Canada relations have made significant progress and are now evolving into a "new chapter."

That's where you can feel it. The relationship between countries is wide-ranging and complex, and there may be some realities that we don't want to see, but ultimately it is a relationship between people. People's goodwill deepens friendship between countries. There is an excellent example between Japan and Canada.

That is the story of Lieutenant (Lt) Robert Hampton Gray and Onagawa Town, Miyagi Prefecture,

Japan.

Lieutenant (Lt) Robert Hampton Gray and Onagawa Town, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan

August 9, 1945

It starts back in the final days of World War II.

On August 9, 1945, the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. On the same day, Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, was also attacked by Allied air raids. Imperial Japanese Navy transport convoys were secretly stationed at the defense base located in Onagawa Bay, a good natural port on the deeply indented coastline. However, Allied intelligence discovered this fact, and a task force led by the Royal Navy aircraft carrier *HMS Formidable* attacked. The attack continued the following day, the 10th. During the two-day attack, seven Japanese warships were sunk and more than 200 people, including 158 Japanese soldiers, were killed. There was one Allied casualty. That man was Lt Robert Hampton Gray, 27, of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. His fellow soldiers affectionately called him "Hammy."



Lieutenant (Lt) Robert Hampton Gray

Photo: Government of Canada

Hammy Gray's Footsteps

Hammy Gray was 23 years old in the summer of 1940, having just completed his undergraduate degree at the prestigious University of British Columbia and entered medical school.

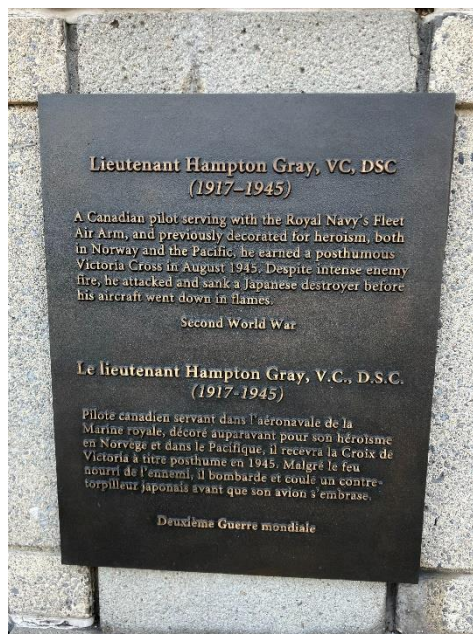
World War II began with Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, but actual combat was limited to Eastern Europe and Northern Europe. In Britain, France, and the United States, it was called the "Phoney War." However, on May 10, 1940, Germany suddenly invaded France. The situation changed drastically. The war was in full swing.

Under such circumstances, medical student Hammy Gray volunteered for the British Commonwealth out of passionate patriotism. He aspired to become a pilot because of his admiration for fighter jets. He trained in Great Britain and became a pilot on the Vought F4U Corsair carrier-based fighter. Although the F4U had destructive power, it was a heavy and unwieldy fighter. Nonetheless, Lt Gray achieved great success on the African and Norwegian fronts and became well-respected as an excellent pilot.

In April 1945, Lt Gray transferred to the British Royal Navy's Grand Fleet. After the Battle of Okinawa, in August, the aircraft carrier HMS *Formidable* task force was assigned to attack Onagawa Bay. Then came the fateful August 9th. Lt Gray led a fleet of F4U carrier-based fighters as the attack leader. He dropped a bomb on the Japanese escort ship *Amakusa* while flying low. He was hit by intensive anti-aircraft fire from the Japanese side and crashed into the sea.

A Canadian Hero

Lt Gray was awarded the Victoria Cross, Canada's highest honor, as the "last fallen man" of World War II. Located in the northeast corner of Confederation Square in the heart of the capital, Ottawa, is the Valiants Memorial, which features life-size busts and bronze statues of 14 important figures from five wars in which Canada was involved, who are considered true heroes. Lt Gray is one of those 14.



Lt Gray's bust at the Valiants Memorial, Ottawa

Photo: Embassy of Japan

The Canadian government planned to erect a memorial monument to Lt Gray in Onagawa, where such a hero was shot down. The Canadian Embassy in Tokyo notified Onagawa of this matter. That was back in 1989.

Onagawa Memorial Monument and Yoshio Kanda

However, although he may be a hero to Canada, to local Onagawa, he was an “enemy” who led the air raid on Onagawa that killed more than 200 people. It is said that there was an overwhelming amount of opposition in the local community.

At this point, Yoshio Kanda, who was a signaler in the Onagawa Defense Force of the Imperial Japanese Navy at the time of the Onagawa Air Raid, stood up. Although Mr. Kanda was originally from Saitama Prefecture, he remained in Onagawa after the war and ran a local clothing store. Then, in 1966, 21 years after the end of the war, Mr. Kanda, who was also an executive of the local veteran’s association, called on his comrades and they built a memorial for the victims of the Onagawa air raid with his own funds.

Then, time passed and the year was 1989.

Amid growing opposition to Lt Gray's memorial, Mr. Kanda said, “Japanese and Canadians share the same hatred for war. What we hate are not enemy soldiers, but war itself,” he said, working hard to persuade opponents. His sincere persuasion was effective.

In August 1989, the cenotaph was completed as a tribute to Lt Gray and a symbol of Canadian-Japanese friendship. The unveiling ceremony was attended by Lt Gray's relatives, including his own sister Phyllis. The people of Onagawa also welcomed them warmly. It is a friendship that overcomes hatred. Easier said than done. However, the relationship between Onagawa and Lt Gray became a wonderful bond between Japan and Canada. By the way, Lt Gray's cenotaph is said to be the only memorial monument for a foreign soldier that exists in Japan.

The anecdote about Lt Gray and Onagawa is already impressive enough. But there's more to the story.

The Story of the Miraculous Flags

In fact, on the occasion of the unveiling ceremony, Mr. Kanda had prepared a Canadian flag to write messages on. Those who participated wrote their name and a message. Since then, Mr. Kanda has carried this flag on various occasions, including the memorial service held on August 9th every year, as a symbol of Japan-Canada friendship. The number of messages from people involved in Japan and Canada continued to increase.

In 2003, the wedding of Marcia, the granddaughter of Lt Gray's sister Phyllis, who attended the unveiling ceremony, was held in Vancouver. Mr. Kanda's family were also invited there. The exchange steadily continues and deepens.

Mr. Kanda passed away in 2005. After that, messages continued to be written on the flag of Japan-Canada friendship, and eventually, when the blank space was filled, a second Canadian flag appeared, and the messages continued.

However, on March 11, 2011, the massive tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake also hit Onagawa. Mr. Kanda's family and home were all swallowed up. His grandson, Yoshitake, who worked for Tohoku Electric Power Company in Sendai, escaped the disaster. It seems that even though he returned to Onagawa many times to search, he could not find any clues for many months. However, in June, Yoshitake found the flags of friendship, old and new, carefully folded in a plastic bag under the rubble. They are truly the "miracle flags" of Japan-Canada friendship.

The messages continue to be added to every time there is a chance. I also signed it with the intention of doing my best to promote friendship between Japan and Canada.

Second Lt Gray Cenotaph

The tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake also engulfed Lt Gray's memorial monument that had been erected along the coast. Therefore, the people of Onagawa rebuilt Lt Gray's cenotaph on a hill in a corner of the grounds of the Onagawa Regional Medical Center, overlooking the sea.

When I visited Onagawa with Ambassador Kaoru Ishikawa and Yoshitake, I laid flowers at the Cenotaph for the Fallen in the Battle of Onagawa Bay, and also at the second cenotaph for Lt Gray. I was humbled to learn of the deep friendship between Japan and Canada.

The following passage is engraved on it:

"Yesterday's enemies have become today's friends, and the people of Onagawa generously assisted in the construction of this monument. May this monument comfort the souls of all those who lost their lives in this battle, and may it serve as a lasting sign of peace and friendship between our two countries."



Ambassador Yamanouchi laying flowers at the cenotaph

Photo: Deputy Mayor Itami, Town of Onagawa

Deepening Exchanges

The other day, Yoshitake contacted me. On Friday, November 10, 2023, 'his eldest son, Ibuki (15 years old), gave a speech in English at the "Remembrance Day Ceremony" held at the Canadian Embassy in Aoyama, Tokyo.

To give some background, World War I is of great significance to Canadian history. World War I began with the Sarajevo Incident on July 1, 1914, but at that time Canada was a self-governing territory of the British Empire and had no diplomatic rights. It was London's decision to enter the war, not Ottawa's. Furthermore, Canada, with a population of 6 million people, had to send over 600,000 Canadians to the front lines. Canadian soldiers bravely fought in difficult battles, including Vimy Ridge, and greatly contributed to the Allied victory. But the sacrifice was also great. That gave Canada a voice. Canada sent a delegation to sign the Treaty of Versailles. This marked a turning point in Canada's development from a self-governing territory to a sovereign nation both in name and reality. Therefore, although Canada has participated in many wars, the Remembrance Day Ceremony is held every year at 11 a.m. on November 11, the day World War I ended in 1918. Governor General Simon and Prime Minister Trudeau were in attendance in Ottawa, as well as ambassadors from various countries, including myself.

That is how important the Remembrance Day Ceremony is to Canada. It was truly wonderful that Mr. Kanda's family was invited there, and their son gave a speech in English. This is how the exchange between Lt Gray and Onagawa has been inherited by Yoshio Kanda's great-grandchild. This is an exchange spanning over 78 years. Because of its significance, it was covered in the news.

Conclusion

Yoshitake gave me the contact information for Marcia, the granddaughter of Lt Gray's sister Phyllis, who currently lives in Ottawa. Right away, the Resident Defense Officer and the head of the Information and Culture section at the Japanese Embassy in Ottawa met with Marcia, a relative of Lt Gray, and exchanged opinions on promoting Japan-Canada exchanges. The friendship between Japan and Canada is steadily deepening.

I believe that the wonderful interaction between Lt Gray and Onagawa is a story that deserves to be told. I would like more people to know about it, and I would like to pass it on to the next generation.

End