

CONSULATE-GENERAL OF JAPAN

601 UNION STREET, SUITE 500
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98101
PHONE: (206) 682-9107
FAX (206) 624-9097

June 27, 2011

Dear Friends,

I. A Visit to Seattle

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Training Squadron paid a visit to Seattle June 15-18. The squadron's last visit to Seattle was in 1998. We are especially glad to have them this year, as it coincides with the centennial of the establishment of the Port of Seattle.

The flagship JS Kashima docked at Pier 66 with approximately 300 crew members aboard including 116 trainee officers. Their commander is Rear Admiral Umio Otsuka. In Japanese, Umio literally means 'man of the sea.' In addition to his connection to the sea, Rear Admiral Otsuka also has a connection to Seattle; his father studied at the University of Washington as a Fulbright scholar.

II. Reaction to Tragedy

The visit of the JMSDF Training Squadron had been arranged over six months ago, but there were serious discussions about whether this mission abroad should continue after the earthquake on March 11th. Some officers requested to go to Tohoku to help the people there instead of traveling overseas this summer. Nearly half of the Japan Self-Defense Forces were already mobilized for disaster relief, but it was decided that the Training Squadron voyage would go ahead as planned.

In addition to their original goal of fostering friendship with their counterparts abroad, they had two new reasons to go. The first was to express deep gratitude to the United States for Operation Tomodachi and other invaluable assistance after the disasters struck. The second reason was to tell the world that Japan is united to overcome all difficulties and ready to rebuild.

On their way to the first port of call in Anchorage, Alaska, they had to navigate very carefully to steer around debris such as oil tanks, shipping containers and houses washed out to sea by the tsunami. Seeing the remnants of so many lives with their own eyes was a heartbreaking experience for the young trainee officers and crew.

III. Friendly Relations with the US Navy

Rear Admiral Otsuka, together with his honor guard and the Training Squadron Band, paid a floral tribute at the Garden of Remembrance next to Benaroya Hall as well as at the Nisei War Memorial Monument at the Lake View Cemetery.

[Type text]



The US Naval counterparts of the trainee officers extended a hearty welcome at Naval Station Everett. Aboard the JS Kashima, the trainee officers had already heard words of wisdom from Rear Admiral Kelly (Ret). In Everett, Commander Limberg echoed his message which impressed upon the trainees the importance of professional partnerships between members of the Japanese and American naval forces. Trainee officers were encouraged to make friends with their counterparts at each stop on their tour. Today's personal connections will help to develop strong allies in the future.

IV. Getting to Know the Locals

The Training Squadron also met with many civilians in Seattle. On June 15th, the Squadron's first night in Seattle, 26 Japanese and Japanese American groups came together to host a lively Community Welcome Dinner for the trainee officers.



[Type text]

The JS Kashima was opened to the public for free tours. Hundreds of excited local visitors attended these open house hours. The JMSDF Training Squadron Band and Navy Band Northwest performed a joint concert at Westlake Plaza. Seeing both forces sharing the stage together as one band to play the official songs of each Navy, “Gunkan March” and “Anchors Aweigh,” was very inspiring.



Finally, I would like to tell a story. An American gentleman happened to look out his window, saw the JS Kashima docking and, in the spirit of friendship, invited some trainee officers to a barbeque party at his penthouse across from Pier 66. Nothing can replace the fond memory of a spontaneous and unexpected generosity.

Alliances can only function with the support of people to people grassroots connections. I believe that, thanks to the kindness of all the people the trainee officers and crew encountered during their stay, the crew of the JS Kashima achieved their mission.

Sincerely,



Kiyokazu Ota
Consul General of Japan in Seattle