

# A Century of History between Japan and the Marshall Islands

Kazuhiko Anzai

(former Japanese Ambassador to the Republic of the Marshall Islands)

## Writing of the century-long history between Japan and the Marshall Islands

It was sometime in the middle of year 2014 and, at that time, I was working at Japanese Embassy in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. An idea struck me to write a fictional story which will introduce the century-long history between Japan and the Marshall Islands.

In my writing, I wished to introduce not only the beautiful vistas of this small insular country but also some historical aspects such as Japan's special relationship with the small groups of islands scattered in the Micronesia Region of the Northern Pacific Ocean. This relationship had started when World War I (WW I) broke out in July 1914. As one of allied countries, Japan was asked to send its military force to the German islands in the Northern Pacific including the Marshall Islands and disarm them.

Then the legacy of some twenty thousand Japanese soldiers who were mobilized and dispatched to almost all atolls of the Marshall Islands during World War II (WW II) but eventually they were forced to perish well before the end of war in August 1945.

I also wished to introduce the partial history of "the Cold War" between U.S. and the Soviet Union took place in the Marshall Islands, where the US had conducted atomic and hydrogen-bomb experiments, in total sixty-seven times, from 1946 until 1958.

By introducing those aspects, I wished that fellow Japanese might grow their interest to the Marshall Islands and some would even wish to visit the country.

People may say it is rather bold to try and accomplish such wish only by a fictional tale written by an amateur writer, which I shall not deny.



Evening calm, Majuro Atoll  
( © Hiroaki Ueda, Raycrew )

## Monolith standing in Laura Village

One day, I learned of a stone monument made before WW II and erected in a small village called Laura in the west end of Majuro Atoll, the place I was residing. Then I decided to visit Laura Village driving my car down to the main road running along the narrow coral land. After driving about forty minutes toward the west from Majuro City, I could arrive at Laura Village's fork road entrance. From there I drove ahead about two hundred meters down the road along the lagoon, and in some vacant land I saw the monument. When I looked at it for the first time, I recalled the mysterious monolith which appeared in Kubrick's film "2001: A Space Odyssey".

The two-meter tall and one meter thick monument was made of green stone slab that rested on a pedestal which added another meter in height. The monument, which was known as "Typhoon Monument" among Japanese residents, was an ordinary monument to the eyes at first, but I was surprised to find that the letters inscribed on it were Japanese. Who built this monument? When? Fortunately, the letters were not damaged at all and so I could read them as follows with a title of "*Sei On Ki Nen*", which meant "*Imperial Favor*".

*"On November 8, 1918, a typhoon hit Majuro Atoll of the Marshall Islands and many houses were washed away by big waves leaving more than two hundred deaths or injuries. When His Majesty the Emperor Taisho received a damage report of the typhoon, decided to disburse his personal finances for charity on January 14, 1919.*

*The islanders survived from typhoon were thankful for His Majesty's generosity and tolerance toward them even if they were in a small atoll far away from Japan.*

*In this respect, aiming to teach the islanders about Japanese notions of piety and remind them the gratitude toward His Majesty, I humbly drafted the inscription which would be observed from generation to generation.*

*November 14, 1919,  
Rear Admiral Yasujiro Nagata,  
Senior Fifth Rank, Second Class Order, Third Merit Grade  
Commanding Officer of Expeditionary Nan'yo Fleet"*



"Typhoon monument"  
at Laura Village, Majuro Atoll  
( © Kazuhiko Anzai )

## From transitional rule by Expeditionary “Nan'yo Fleet” to a mandate by “Nan'yo Cho”

This monument records the restoration activities of Expeditionary Nan'yo (or “South Pacific”) Fleet of Japanese Imperial Navy after a disaster that occurred in the early stage of transitional ruling conducted by the fleet. And so, I decided to mention this monument and its inscription in my writing if I could verify them as a historical fact.

For that reason, I accessed to the JACAR website and searched for related documents. Consequently, the following facts became clear: i) the commanding officer reported the typhoon damage to the Admiralty in Tokyo and then it was forwarded to the Imperial Household Ministry which administered the matters to be reported to the Emperor.

ii) eventually based on the report, five thousand yen was granted as money of personal possession of the Emperor. iii) the fleet provided islanders in Majuro Atoll with rice and other provisions. (just for your reference, I would like to mention that even nowadays, the staple food of Marshallese is boiled rice.)

In addition, by searching the documents in JACAR, the following facts also became clear: iv) while Rear Admiral Yasujiro Nagata served as the fourth commanding officer of the fleet from January 1918 until the end of 1919, he had established transitional rules for civil affairs and built the islanders school —which became “the Public School” later — on June 1918. v) he unified the names of the major islands in the Micronesian Region on January 1919. vi) he built elementary schools for child of Japanese residents in the region in August 1919.

I also found the fact that Japanese education spread through the public schools, became a common language in the region. Moreover, the transitional rules for civil affairs introduced by Japanese Imperial Navy was succeeded by “Nan'yo Cho” (or “South Pacific Mandate”), which was established by Japanese Government in March 1922.

Such discoveries from the documents stored at Digital Archive of JACAR were very helpful when I tried to write the episodes belong to history of century ago.



“War memorial in the Eastern Pacific Region”,  
Majuro Atoll  
(© Kazuhiko Anzai )

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