

Japanese midget submarine attacks on Sydney, 1942

On the night of 29 May 1942, five large Japanese submarines positioned themselves 56 kilometres north-east of Sydney Heads. At 3.00 am the next day one of the submarines launched a reconnaissance aircraft. After circling Sydney Harbour the aircraft returned to its submarine, reporting the presence of 'battleships and cruisers' moored in the harbour. The flotilla's commanding officer decided to attack the harbour with midget submarines the next night. The next day the five submarines approached to within 11 kilometres of Sydney Heads, and at about 4.30 pm they released three midget submarines which then began their approach to Sydney Harbour.

The outer-harbour defences detected the entry of the first midget submarine at about 8.00 pm, but it was not identified until it became entangled in an anti-torpedo net that was suspended between George's Head and Green Point. Before HMAS *Yarroma* was able to open fire the submarine's two crew members destroyed their vessel with demolition charges and killed themselves.

The second submarine entered the harbour at about 9.48 pm and headed west towards the Harbour Bridge, causing a general alarm to be issued by the Naval Officer in Charge, Sydney. About 200 metres from Garden Island the submarine was fired on by the heavy cruiser USS *Chicago*. The submarine then fired its two torpedoes at the cruiser. One torpedo ran ashore on Garden Island but failed to explode. The other passed under the Dutch submarine *K9* and struck the harbour bed beneath the depot ship HMAS *Kuttabul* where it exploded, killing 21 sailors (19 Royal Australian Navy and 2 Royal Navy). The submarine then slipped out of the harbour, its mission complete.

The third submarine was sighted by HMAS *Yandra* at the entrance to the harbour and was depth-charged. Some four hours later, having recovered, it entered the harbour but it was subsequently attacked with depth charges and sunk in Taylor Bay by vessels of the Royal Australian Navy. Both members of the submarine's crew committed suicide.

The two submarines that were recovered were identical, and their remains were used to reconstruct a complete submarine, which toured New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia before being delivered to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra in 1943, where it remains on display.

The records held by the National Archives and the Australian War Memorial on the midget submarine attack are listed in the table below.

Records relating to the Japanese midget submarine attacks on Sydney Harbour

Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Japanese midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour</u>	1942	SP338/1, 201/37
<u>Transfer to the Australian War Museum of motor removed from Japanese midget submarine</u>	1944–47	SP339/1, 235/1/200
<u>Photographs of Japanese midget submarine restored by Cockatoo Island Dockyard apprentices (two prints)</u>	1985–87	M3659, 21

Melbourne

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Japanese midget submarine – sections stowed at Clark Island</u>	1944	MP138/1, 603/223/1505
<u>Probable use by Japanese of whaling vessels as mother ships for midget submarines</u>	1942	MP150/1, 449/201/1056
<u>Awards in connection with Japanese midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour</u>	1942	MP151/1, 487/201/474
<u>Midget submarine detection exercises</u>	1942	MP1049/5, 2002/2/156
<u>Attack by midget submarines on Sydney Harbour – appreciation from study of Japanese charts</u>	1942	MP1049/5, 1855/6/20
<u>Magnetic surveys – Japanese midget submarines</u>	1942	MP1049/5, 2026/21/20
<u>Midget submarine salvage operations</u>	1942	MP1049/5, 2026/21/33
<u>Japanese midget submarines – technical reports</u>	1942–46	MP1049/5, 2026/21/36
<u>Midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour</u>	1942–46	MP1049/5, 2026/21/79
<u>Ashes of Japanese naval men whose bodies were recovered from Sydney Harbour</u>	1942	MP1185/8, 1877/13/320
<u>Midget submarines – attack on shipping in Sydney Harbour – official reports, newspaper cuttings etc</u>	1942–58	MP1587/1, 162I
<u>Midget submarines – attack on Sydney Harbour – signals</u>	1942	MP1587/1, 162K
<u>Japanese midget submarines (includes two drawings)</u>	1941–44	MP1587/1, 174S

Darwin

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Japanese midget submarine bypass valve sent for exhibition in Alice Springs</u>	1942	F1, 1943/26

Australian War Memorial, Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Plans, diagrams and photographs of midget Japanese submarine and components involved in Sydney Harbour attack</u>	1942	AWM54, 505/6/7

<u>Japanese midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour – reconstruction of events from Japanese and Australian sources by G Hermon Gill</u>	1954	AWM54, 622/5/8
<u>Official History, 1939–45 War – Records of Gavin Long, General Editor (includes historical narratives re the Japanese midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour)</u>	undated	AWM67, 11/54
<u>Official History, 1939–45 War – Records of G Hermon Gill – Japanese midget submarines attack on Sydney Harbour</u>	1942	AWM69, 185
<u>Report of investigation into torpedo fired from Japanese midget submarine during attack on Sydney Harbour, 7–8 June 1942</u>	1942–43	AWM124, 4/473
<u>Condensed report of torpedo from one of the two-man Japanese midget submarines operating in Sydney Harbour</u>	1942	AWM124, 4/474