

HISTORIC DAY AT PEARL HARBOR

U.S., Japan seek absolution from the war

By JOSH LEDERMAN
and CALEB JONES
Associated Press

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii — In a historic pilgrimage, the leaders of Japan and the United States took to the hallowed waters of Pearl Harbor on Tuesday to prove that even the bitterest enemies can become allies. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not apologize, but conceded Japan “must never repeat the horrors of war again.”

Seventy-five years after Japan’s surprise attack sent America marching into World War II, Abe and President Barack Obama peered down at the rusting wreckage of the USS Arizona, clearly visible in the tranquil, teal water. More than 1,000 U.S. war dead remain entombed in the submerged ship, and in a show of respect, Obama and Abe dropped purple petals into the water and stood in silence.

“As the prime minister of Japan, I offer my sincere and everlasting condolences to the souls of those who lost their lives here, as well as to the spirits of all the brave men and women whose lives were taken by a war that commenced in this very place,” Abe said later at nearby Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

That was the closest Abe would get to an apology for the attack. And it was enough for Obama, who also declined to apologize seven months ago when he became America’s first sitting president to visit Hiroshima, where the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb in a bid to end the war.

It was enough, too, for Alfred Rodrigues, a U.S. Navy veteran who survived the attack. The 96-year-old said he had no hard feelings and added, “War is war.”

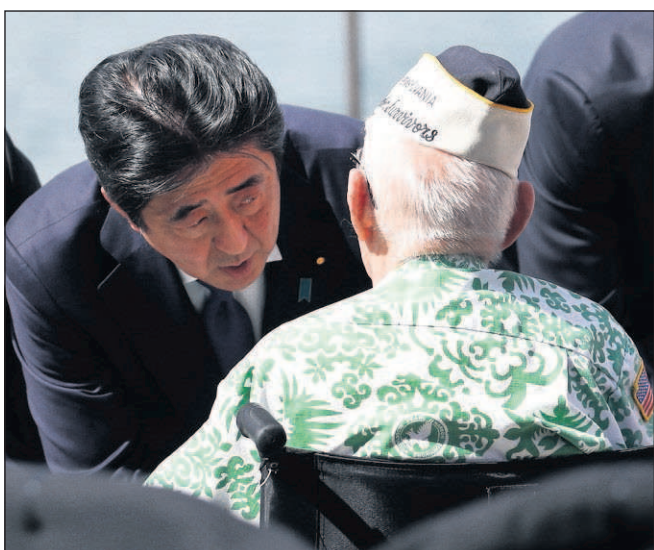
“They were doing what they were supposed to do, and we were doing what we were supposed to do,” Rodrigues said before the visit.

Abe, who became Japan’s



Dennis Oda/The Star-Advertiser via AP

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, left, and U.S. President Barack Obama, second from right, toss flower petals into the Wishing Well at the USS Arizona Memorial, part of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii on Tuesday. Abe and Obama made a historic pilgrimage to the site where the devastating surprise attack sent America marching into World War II.



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe talks with a World War II Pearl Harbor survivor after he and U.S. President Barack Obama spoke Tuesday on Kilo Pier overlooking the USS Arizona Memorial.

first leader to visit Pearl Harbor with a U.S. president, said the visit “brought utter silence to me.” His remarks capped a day that was care-

fully choreographed by the U.S. and Japan to show a strong and growing alliance between former foes.

They started with a formal

“I offer my sincere and everlasting condolences to the souls of those who lost their lives here...”

— Shinzo Abe, Japanese prime minister

meeting at another nearby military base, in what the White House said was likely Obama’s last meeting with a foreign leader before leaving office in January. It was a bookend of sorts for the president, who nearly eight years ago invited Abe’s predecessor to be the first leader he hosted at the White House.

Obama, speaking after he and Abe laid green-and-peach wreaths at the memorial, called the harbor a sacred place and said that “even the deepest wounds of war can give way to friendship and lasting peace.” It’s a notion

Obama tried throughout his presidency to put into practice, as he reached out to former adversaries Iran, Myanmar and Cuba.

“As we lay a wreath or toss flowers into waters that still weep, we think of the more than 2,400 American patriots, fathers and husbands, wives and daughters, manning heaven’s rails for all eternity,” Obama said.

Then the two leaders greeted survivors in the crowd. They shook hands and hugged some of the men who fought in the Dec. 7, 1941, battle that President Franklin

D. Roosevelt called a “date which will live in infamy.”

Japanese leaders have visited Pearl Harbor before, but Abe was the first to go to the memorial above the sunken USS Arizona, where a marbled wall lists the names of U.S. troops killed in the Japanese attack.

For Abe, it was an act of symbolic reciprocity, coming seven months after Obama and Abe visited Hiroshima together and renewed their calls for a nuclear-free future. Still, both governments maintain that the visits were separate and not contingent upon one another.

The visit was not without political risk for Abe, given the Japanese people’s long, emotional reckoning with their nation’s aggression in the war. Though the history books have largely deemed Pearl Harbor a surprise attack, Japan’s government still insists it had intended to give prior notice that it was declaring war and failed only because of “bureaucratic bungling.”

“There’s this sense of guilt, if you like, among Japanese, this ‘Pearl Harbor syndrome,’ that we did something very unfair,” said Tamaki Tsukada, a minister in the Embassy of Japan in Washington. He said he believes Abe’s visit would “absolve that kind of complex that Japanese people have.”

In the years after Pearl Harbor, the U.S. incarcerated roughly 120,000 Japanese-Americans in internment camps before dropping atomic bombs in 1945 that killed some 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 70,000 in Nagasaki.

Since the war, the U.S. and Japan have built a powerful alliance that both sides say has grown during Obama’s tenure, including strengthened military ties. Yet there are questions about whether the relationship will degenerate under President-elect Donald Trump, a possibility neither Obama nor Abe addressed.

Investigators study black box from Black Sea jet crash

Associated Press

SOCHI, Russia — Investigators recovered the flight-data recorder from a crashed Russian military plane Tuesday and began reviewing its contents to learn why the jet went down moments after takeoff, killing all 92 people aboard, including members of a famous choir.

The Tu-154 crashed into the Black Sea early Sunday two minutes after departing in good weather from the city of Sochi. The plane was carrying members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, widely known as the Red Army Choir, to a New Year’s concert at a Russian military base in Syria.

Meanwhile, rescue workers raced to wrap up their efforts to recover bodies and wreckage ahead of predicted bad weather. The work has involved 3,500 people, including about 200 navy divers flown to the site from all over Russia. Aided by drones and submersibles, teams have recovered 12 bodies and numerous body fragments about a mile away from the shore.

The main flight recorder was quickly flown to Moscow, where experts started analyzing it, Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said. Preliminary findings could be available as early as Wednesday, according to some aviation experts.

Investigators were looking into whether the crash might have been caused by bad fuel, pilot error, equipment failure or objects stuck in the engines. The top Russian investigative agency, known as the Investigative Committee, said it had taken samples from a fuel tank used to fill the plane, which flew from Moscow’s Chkalovsky military airport and stopped in Sochi for refueling.



AP Photo/Ivan Sekretarev

Portraits of the Alexandrov Ensemble members are placed with candles and flowers Tuesday in front of the Alexandrov Ensemble building in Moscow, Russia.

The committee also said it found a witness who filmed the crash but offered no details.

Online publication Life.ru published what it described as a script of cockpit conversation, with one pilot yelling about a problem with the plane’s flaps and then shouting: “Commander, we are falling!” It was impossible to verify the report, but Life.ru is known to have good connections with Russian security agencies.

Flaps are moveable panels mounted on the edge of the wings to increase lift.

The Interfax news agency reported that the flaps were not functioning in sync, causing the jet to lose speed and triggering an aerodynamic stall. It also said that the preliminary analysis of the flight recorder pointed at pilot error.

The government has sought to quell speculation that the crash might have been caused by a bomb planted on board or a portable air-defense missile. A terrorist attack on a Syria-bound military flight would badly embarrass the Kremlin at a time when it boasts about the success of its campaign

in Syria after Aleppo fell into President Bashar Assad’s hands.

Russia’s main domestic security and counter-terrorism agency, the FSB, said it found “no indications or facts pointing at the possibility of a terror attack or an act of sabotage” on the plane.

However, some aviation experts have noted that the crew’s failure to report any technical problem and the large area over which fragments of the plane were scattered point to a possible explosion on board.

The Tu-154 is a Soviet-built three-engine airliner designed in the late 1960s. Russian airlines decommissioned the noisy, fuel-guzzling aircraft years ago, but the military and other government agencies continue using the plane, which is still loved by crews for its maneuverability and sturdiness.

The plane that crashed Sunday was built in 1983 and underwent factory checkups and maintenance in 2014 as well as earlier this year. Investigators have taken relevant documents from the plant that did the job.



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