



On a sunny December day in Yokosuka's Mikasa Park, I snapped a photo of the *Mikasa* battleship's chrysanthemum prow and posed in front of Admiral Heihachiro Togo's statue. The old battleship is in great shape now, but she was in very poor condition when I first saw her in the 1950s. By that time, she had been world-famous for half a century, ever since Admiral Togo rode her as his flagship in the extraordinarily lopsided 1905 victory over the Russian Baltic Fleet. She was enshrined at Yokosuka in the 1920s. Then, immediately after the Pacific War of the 1940s, Russians with long-held grudges demanded that the magnificent *Mikasa* memorial ship be disarmed and effectively gutted, and this was done. The guns and masts were removed, and an ugly barn-like structure was built on her main deck, providing a dance hall and nightclub for American

Battleship Restored



sailors. Thus a mighty warship was desecrated — becoming rusty inside and out — and that's the way I saw her more than 45 years ago. In those days I was the editor of a small Tokyo magazine, and I played an inconsequential role in raising money to restore the *Mikasa*. In the early 1960s, shortly before the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, she was put back into mint condition, and she sits today in all her glory at the Yokosuka park. Figuratively if not literally, she stands alongside America's *USS Constitution* and England's *HMS Victory*. The *Mikasa*'s victory over the Russians in the Tsushima Strait a hundred years ago was tactically similar to the *Victory*'s triumph over the French at Trafalgar two hundred years earlier. Both were flagships in those battles, and Admiral Togo did to the Russians exactly what Admiral Horatio Nelson did to the French. He “crossed the T.” The tactic is easier to explain with hand signals than with words. If an admiral can position his lined-up warships across the path of an advancing line of enemy ships, he can deliver broadsides that the enemy

can answer only with a few forward guns. The “T” has been crossed, and the enemy is in deep trouble. Just look what happened in Tsushima Strait seas between Japan and Korea in 1905. The Russo-Japanese War was dragging on, and the Russians were taking a licking in Manchuria on the mainland. The impressive Russian Baltic Fleet steamed all the way around Africa, up through the Indian Ocean and then along the Chinese coast — determined to teach the uppity Japanese a lesson. Admiral Togo aboard the *Mikasa* lay waiting. He “crossed the T” on the Russians, and the slaughter began. Nineteen Russian ships were sunk, 12 captured, and the seven that got away were so badly damaged that several had to be scuttled to avoid eventual capture. Japan lost only three little torpedo boats! One can speculate as to what would have happened if Japan had not won that war. Would its leaders have felt confident enough to attack Pearl Harbor 36 years later?

Jackson Sellers
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Mikasa Corner

I have other pictures that would be appropriate here, but they are all professionally framed, and I am unwilling to disassemble them for scanning. They hang in a corner of my workshop, next to the electrical panel and my honorable discharge from the U.S. Navy. They all stem from a brief time in 1959 when I was editor of a Tokyo magazine. One shows me with the “Z” flag flown by the *Mikasa* to signal the 1905 attack. Another shows Admiral Togo in formal uniform, his chest virtually covered with medals awarded by Japan's grateful emperor.