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## Saving Australia: Curtin's secret peace with Japan

Book launch and public lecture presented by Bob Wurth on 12 May 2006.

Do I come into this place today, this of all places, and have the presumption to ask you to accept the proposition that John Curtin, at a critical stage in Australia's survival in 1941, had a close, personal relationship with the representative of the Emperor of Japan? That is precisely what I do and ask.

Do I ask you to accept that John Curtin and the Emperor's envoy reached an agreement to safeguard Australia from Japanese attack? What I am saying is that this is what the envoy has written in the documentation that I have found in Japan and I ask that the material as presented in the book be evaluated.

If the Japanese version of these events is correct, was this specific agreement between two men an act of appeasement, weakness and isolationism, as forcefully argued ten days ago by the Australian Foreign Minister?

In 2000 I became fascinated by a reference in David Day's landmark biography – John Curtin, a life, (HarperCollins) – to Curtin's discussions with a Japanese envoy in 1941, hoping that they might settle the growing tension in the Pacific and avoid war. Day briefly mentioned the talks between Curtin and Tatsuo Kawai – Japan's first Minister, effectively ambassador, to Australia. This was more than I could discover anywhere.

Day observed: 'The details of these talks no longer seem to be extant.' Those words leapt out at me and began a journey into the past.

To say that Tatsuo Kawai was an enigmatic character is an understatement. Kawai came to Australia in March 1941 as a strident pioneer exponent of the Greater East

Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. He also was a friend of warmongers. Kawai had been the international voice of Japan's expansionism as the Foreign Ministry's Director of Information. In this role he had demanded acceptance of Japan's leadership over all of Asia, had praised Hitler and condemned Roosevelt.

We tend to think of Japanese expansionists in that era as being subservient to the prevailing view. Remarkably, he was his own man. He often demonstrated rebelliousness against his superiors and the military. In 1940, after leading a strike at the Foreign Ministry, he was dismissed as official spokesman. He became roving ambassador to America and Europe, including Nazi occupied Europe, where his ardour for Hitler cooled as he was entertained in palaces by Nazi butchers whose atrocities against the Jews and others were there to be seen.

Could this man Kawai then be the same man who would later call John Curtin one of his best friends? I struggled with the concept of Kawai as the uncompromising friend of fascists and warmongers. Was he an unheralded Australian hero or, in the end and strangely, all of these?

When Kawai left Australia in August of 1942, John Curtin played mightily on his mind, sufficient for him to recall twenty years later:

"After being detained for seven months and without even an opportunity to bid him farewell I made my departure from Australia, silently praying for his good health and a brave fight."

Strange words indeed for the enemy; it is clear that after coming under the influence of John Curtin, Tatsuo Kawai had become, rather remarkably, a pacifist, as testified in a report to Canberra by the captain of his guard. Back home in wartime Japan in October 1942, Kawai was ostracised for calling on his countrymen not to hate Australians. As the Japanese Biographical Encyclopedia records, Kawai was despatched to Peking in 1945 as Japan's special envoy "to negotiate all-out peace just before the end of the war."

Friends and family would later describe Tatsuo Kawai to me as 'a man of two faces', not two-faced, but of two distinct personalities. When the great swirling madness of

war dissipated, Kawai incongruously maintained his friendship with extremists. Indeed in 1949 Kawai harbored a man considered by some as one of the most evil and monstrous Japanese war criminals ever to go unpunished, Colonel Masanobu Tsuji, the very personification of evil.

In 2002 I met, almost by accident, a gentle former Japanese soldier, Toshiro Takeuchi, a friend and neighbour of Kawai's. Takeuchi still is the innkeeper at the Hotel Ichibo-kaku at Manazuru, overlooking the bay of Sagami, south of Tokyo. Did he know Kawai, I asked? Yes, he replied, he sold me the land for this hotel. Did Kawai talk about Australia? Yes, not often, but whenever he mentioned Australia he was bright and happy. Did Kawai talk about John Curtin? Yes he certainly did, as Takeuchi explained:

"He mentioned that. As he was a personal friend, above the official line. Always he was invited by his (Curtin's) family. Not as an ambassador, well at the official level as an ambassador to Australia, but as his friend."

Masumi Kawai was unambiguous about his father's friendship with John Curtin: "Well he didn't tell me why he loved Australia, loved John Curtin and loved Elsie Curtin, but he did." When I asked the son how close John Curtin and Tatsuo Kawai were in 1941, Masumi Kawai said this:

"John Curtin was a gentleman who impressed my father very highly; deeply and highly. More than anyone! So Menzies, of course you know, officially very close but personally and privately close gentleman was John Curtin I suppose. I think that is the reason why my father changed after his Australian life ... So the Australia-Japan relation is the start-line of my father after the wartime."

As their countries edged towards war in 1941, John Curtin and Tatsuo Kawai at a critical time were able to slice through the niceties of diplomacy and political rhetoric to debate crucial issues of war and peace with absolute frankness.

Kawai's friend the innkeeper Takeuchi, in a storm, led me the short distance through a bamboo grove to Kawai's classic retreat house at Manazuru. In the gloom I saw what I thought was a shelf full of books. There I discovered Kawai's life story in

photographs. There were 42 aging photograph albums, including the images of Kawai's 18 months in Australia. But there was more than that. The albums included a number of photographs sent over the years by Elsie Curtin to Japan, including one photo of her with husband John marked 'with best wishes to Mr & Mrs Tatsuo Kawai', probably posted just after the war.

Kawai had first visited the Curtin's Cottesloe house in July 1941 at the invitation of John Curtin, then Opposition Leader. Curtin later came in for criticism for inviting Kawai at that time. After one year of requests to the Japan Australia Society, in late 2001 I received a message from Tokyo just before visiting Japan: 'Would you be interested in some of Mr Kawai's writings about Mr John Curtin?' In Tokyo I collected the document – written in Japanese by Kawai for the Society in 1962. It had a photograph of John and Elsie Curtin at the front and the self portrait of a little ballerina, Beverley Lane, the Curtin's granddaughter, on the back.

This document is titled 'John Curtin, The politician', and in it Kawai summarises their 1941 talks, opening in dot point, which I interpret as Curtin asking Kawai if war could be avoided:

And in this world, in a strange country, this politician of such distinctive character appears.

Is there no hope now of Japan getting out?

Actually, no, it is not an issue of whether there is hope or not. It is an issue of getting out or not.

We must thoroughly think this issue through, then cut open a path to that.

Kawai went on to write of his meeting in April 1941 with Curtin in the ALP's Melbourne office which became "a lengthy, personal conversation, a frank discussion on how to disentangle the present, increasingly grim Japan-Australia relations," to quote Kawai. The paper focused on the iron ore deposits at Yampi Sound, where Japanese interests had mining leases. The Lyons Government had banned iron ore

exports in 1938. Kawai wrote that doubt between the two countries was growing by the day and trade had dropped off. Kawai wrote:

Focusing on this point we proposed a collaborative effort to deliberately boost trade. We concurred that if that could mitigate the tension, it might become an avenue to unlock the unexpected state of affairs.

Our conversations then went on to discussion of specific measures. Following that his demeanour formalised as he said, 'If Japan will do that for us, then it would be okay for the subordinate Australian side to lift the seizure of the Yampi Sound, but Japan must guarantee Australia's safety.'

Speaking to me from his heart, he added, 'Don't take what I have said thus far as the candid words of someone in no position of responsibility. My Labor Party is the Opposition at the moment, but it holds an equal amount of Lower House seats to the two Coalition parties, and it is only the Chairman's seat that we are short of. I am also in a position whereby I can speak sufficiently to Prime Minister Menzies.'

I was deeply impressed by his attitude and character. From that moment my feelings of friendship towards him grew rapidly.

Back in 1938 John Curtin had acknowledged that Australian iron ore, as he put it, "may be used for the manufacture of munitions and for aggressive purposes by warlike countries". Yet at that time he still urged that the Australian iron ore export embargo be lifted. Curtin's views though would undergo change.

It is perhaps inevitable that political preconceptions would enter into the debate once the details of the Kawai-Curtin talks were known. Now I can only hope that future debate will be based on a more thorough examination of the new information. On May 2, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, commenting on the initial findings about the iron ore agreement of 1941, wrote in response:

"The deal was an act of weakness and isolationism, and its effects, had it been implemented, would have been catastrophic. It would have been an important boost

to Japan's subsequent ability to wage war by supplying key raw material for the manufacture of weapons and armaments."

My conclusion is that up until early to mid 1941, John Curtin, like most members of the Australian Parliament, including Robert Menzies, did indeed attempt to placate Japan with the view of keeping Japan out of the war.

But this issue of appeasement needs to be put into perspective. Curtin in fact was among the very first in Parliament in 1941 on either side to accurately perceive the extent of the looming threat from Japan, and its catastrophic possibilities. Even as Leader of the Opposition, Curtin indeed led the way for the Menzies and Fadden Governments on international affairs affecting Asia and the Pacific.

Curtin was pro-active in dialogue with Japan. On the other side, Menzies' Minister for External Affairs, Sir Frederick Stewart, told his private secretary Ralph Harry that he wanted to "get together" with Kawai, but thought it would be interpreted as weakness.

"What Sir Frederick, as Minister for External Affairs was unable to do", Ralph Harry said, "John Curtin, as Leader of the Opposition, actually did."

The timing is important. We must understand that opinions on Japan – especially John Curtin's – were constantly shifting ground. Curtin wasn't illogically moving backwards and forwards in his views in 1941, but was steadily shifting forward in a measured direction commensurate with the extent of the rising threat. This can be seen clearly in Curtin's public and private statements, including his remarks to the Advisory War Council.

Gradually, Curtin – the pacifist of the thirties – began emerging as Curtin the war leader, even before becoming Prime Minister. It is a nonsense for anyone to conclude blandly that "Curtin was an appeaser", or even to argue the reverse, without specific reference to a particular period of time in Curtin's life. Australian history, accurately reflected, is too important for simplistic, knee-jerk reactions from national leaders on any side of politics.

No agreement discussed in April 1941 was ever implemented between Curtin and Kawai, and surely this is what matters. One commentator, Hal Colebatch, says it would have been approaching treason for Curtin not to have informed Prime Minister Robert Menzies of his peace feelers. True. But Menzies was informed by Curtin, as the Advisory War Council minutes of June 5, 1941, clearly show. Whether Curtin mentioned the specific detail about access to iron ore is not recorded.

It is clear that the Menzies Government never had the ability to engage in a free and on-going dialogue with the Japanese ambassador in those critical months. Consider this remark in a letter from Prime Minister Menzies to Kawai dated July 11, 1941:

“On the question of Japan’s food supplies, I earnestly hope that your Government does not overlook the ready co-operation that has been forthcoming from Australia.”

Japan then was preparing to occupy southern Indo-China. A few days after Menzies’ penned his letter Tatsuo Kawai, at the invitation of Curtin, made a 16-hour flight from Melbourne to dine with John and Elsie Curtin at their home at Cottesloe. As Curtin’s widow Elsie would later write:

“It was only a few months before Pearl Harbor and ‘Dad’ was criticised later for having entertained the Minister. His reason for the dinner was to maintain friendly relations with Japan as long as possible.”

During August 1941, Curtin continued his peace feelers with Kawai and his written record demonstrates that he was becoming more realistic and pragmatic about Japan. On August 6, 1941, Curtin told the Advisory War Council that if war with Japan was to be inevitable “...we should bring pressure to bear on the USA to knock Japan out now.” You can readily detect a trend with Curtin – keep talking peace, while preparing for war.

Two days after Curtin’s statement on August 8 1941, Prime Minister Menzies – “still standing almost hushed at the most vital hour in the history of Australia”, as he put it – addressed a business audience in Adelaide. “We in Australia still pray for peace in that quarter”, Menzies said, “and still offer no cause for offence to our great neighbour in the north.”

Which approach was correct? It is a telling commentary on John Curtin's character that before it was too late in 1941, he recognised that appeasement of Japan was misguided. Curtin showed signs of change as early as February 1941 when he got Acting Prime Minister Artie Fadden into twice joining with him to issue two public statements about the Japanese threat – joint statements that Prime Minister Menzies, then in London, immediately downplayed.

It is a gross misrepresentation to use this iron ore agreement, as described by Kawai, to state that John Curtin was not prepared to confront tyrannical regimes, even if you might argue that this had been the case earlier in his career. If the agreement over Yampi Sound iron ore had continued into Curtin's prime ministership, then Alexander Downer's thesis would be correct. But the agreement as stated by Kawai was short lived, perhaps no more than a month or two, before Curtin's thinking had moved on.

Partisan interpretations of this new material are regrettable, especially by people who clearly had not read the book. I sense an effort to re-write history, perhaps to bolster contemporary political policy about a faraway war. The Foreign Minister of Australia has taken one portion of the complex relationship between Tatsuo Kawai and John Curtin – the iron ore agreement as described by Kawai, and lumps it all in with Curtin's well-documented early pacifism and isolationism. Mr Downer is contributing to the new and growing "white-anting" of John Curtin's established record as a war leader. This is to be regretted, even if Mr Downer in his thesis of ten days ago did rather reluctantly state, and I quote: "Curtin did fulfil his responsibilities ... and partly redeemed his reputation ... once he became prime minister." Surely this should be the crux of the debate?

Curtin, like others, made serious mistakes as Opposition Leader. But is he to be criticised for dialogue with a potential enemy? What matters is that he saw the light. He saw the light in the second half of 1941 and as Prime Minister of Australia he acted most decisively when it came to aggression.

By early December Curtin was positively hawkish. He urged to the prevaricating British "we go in first" across the Thai-Malay border to block the Japanese. Joe



Alexander, bureau chief of the Melbourne Herald – one of those with whom Curtin shared the most hair-raising war secrets – wrote in his diary on December 3, 1941: “Curtin still dissatisfied with the British Government weakness in dealing with the Japanese menace.”

I may have lost something here, but this sure doesn't sound to me like someone afraid to confront tyrannical regimes.

The reality is that during the second half of 1941 Curtin realised that to grant Japan access to Yampi Sound iron ore would be a break with our allies and an impossibility in the worsening international climate. Curtin's greatest fear was a war with Japan in which the US was neutral.

There is little doubt that Tatsuo Kawai was attempting to entice Australia into a peace of sorts and away from Britain. Curtin had shown a strong independent streak and antagonism towards Britain. The Japanese seized on this Australian nationalism. But they badly misinterpreted its nature, extent and thrust and regarded Australia as 'almost neutral' as they worked, unsuccessfully, to isolate Australia from the Britain.

To appease; to bring a state of peace, quiet, ease and content – or – as the dictionary says, to accede to the belligerent demands of a country or government by sacrifice of justice. Did Curtin accede to the belligerent demands by sacrifice of justice? While we might argue that Curtin's isolationism of the late thirties was dangerously ill-considered, any reasonable interpretation of Curtin's words and deeds in this new debate must produce the fair answer: no.

The irony is this: the first Japanese Minister in Australia, Tatsuo Kawai, became the pacifist under the influence of John Curtin. Curtin, as time went on, far from not wanting to confront tyrannical regimes, abandoned pacifism to become the warrior at the critical hour. Curtin also left a legacy of a fiercely Australian independent approach to foreign affairs, one in which Australia befriended foreign powers, while retaining the right to criticise and speak boldly to them.

Attempts to rewrite history from a contemporary political slant are sadly unworthy. We owe it to the students of today and the citizens of tomorrow to be accurate about Australian history.

Alarminglly, Alexander Downer's revisionist approach to Australia's military and political history lately is matched by the national body enshrined to preserve the memory and honour of our war dead – the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. The Memorial has developed a warped sense both of Curtin's role as our war leader and the seriousness of the Japanese threat to Australia. The Memorial's principal historian for the last 18 years, Dr Peter Stanley, writes: "Curtin... saved Australia from a threat that was never real and he knew it....."

Stanley perpetuates arguments that do not stand serious scrutiny. He seems to have gained support for his revisionist views from the Memorial's director, Major General Steve Gower, who has said the historian has "some legitimate arguments." Yet it seems that only one, loud voice is coming from the AWM.

Writing in the Griffith Review last spring, Stanley said:

"It seems to be that Australians want to believe that they were part of a war, that the war came close; that it mattered. Why can't we as a nation accept that the war the Allies fought was decided far from Australia – in North Africa, north-west Europe and above all on the steppes of European Russia. Why do we appear to want to believe that Australia really was threatened with invasion, that it was attacked; even that the Japanese commandoes really did want to land on its shores? Set against the prosaic reality, the desire is poignant and rather pathetic."

Stanley also writes: "...there was no invasion; there was never going to be an invasion." My work shows that no-one can accurately say that there was never going to be a Japanese invasion of Australia. Senior Japanese planners indeed toyed with and argued over an invasion of Australia. While no definitive invasion plan was ever put into place, the Japanese Navy and Army seriously debated an invasion at the highest level. For a time in early 1942, an invasion of Australia was a definite option.

Japan 's war history series, Senshi Sosho, published by Japan's Institute for Defense Studies, speaking of the Japanese Navy, commented:

“Underlying this basic policy was support for the invasion of Australia, the main area from which the United States would launch counter-offences against the Japanese.”

In 1942 the Navy's proposed operational plans were radical and aggressive, while the Army proposed a defensive strategy. The Navy plans involved “launching a direct attack against Australia”, as Senshi Sosho records, in what was an attempt to foil a US counter-attack from Australia.

There are ample references in historical documents to the Japanese Navy's strenuous efforts for its invasion plan and its debates with the Army in 1942. Colonel Takushiro Hattori, an Army operations chief at Imperial General Headquarters, has documented how he fought against Navy recklessness over the issue: “From early in 1942, the plans for the invasion of Australia were under consideration by a faction in the Navy,” Hattori wrote. Hattori said the Navy proposed using five Army divisions to invade Australia, but he estimated that 12 divisions would be needed, and shipping well beyond Japan's capacity.

Stanley quickly dismisses this as the work of “middle-ranking officers in Tokyo.” Yet evidence shows that these middle-ranking officers were set to their task by high ranking officers, so it was much more than a mere junior discussion club. Combined Fleet chief of staff Admiral Matome Ugaki was one who was keen on an invasion of Australia.

The debate went as high as Emperor Hirohito, but he had other priorities, so it was put aside for later consideration. I contend that over time Japanese disasters in major sea campaigns, Allied successes on land, and Japan's overstretched capability all contributed towards delaying, deferring and then altering the course of events and actions for Japan, and in turn, Australia.

Stanley tells Australians they got it all wrong about Curtin in the name of “patriotism and insular parochialism”. True, there have been many inaccurate accounts of Australia's involvement in the war, but this does not mean that you

should take a broad, tabloid brush to our recorded history. Stanley's revisionism uses derisive language to drive home a view that Australians have been blinded, swept up in "folklore, rumour and exaggeration". Stanley disgracefully dismissed historians and writers of history who disagreed with his views, as in the Griffith Review, and I quote:

"In the eyes of these nationalist historians, such as David Day, and popular writers who follow them, such as journalists Paul Ham and Peter FitzSimons, Australia faced an actual threat of imminent invasion, a danger dispelled by a combination of a resolute Curtin in Canberra and heroic diggers in Papua....The populist writers following his (Day's) lead repeat the same litany of half-truths or pseudo-facts: the British betrayed "us" at Singapore; Churchill tried to keep Australian troops to fight a different war in Europe; Curtin stood up to the bullying Churchill; and above, all, Australia was saved from a Japanese invasion."

David Day's monumental work needs no explanation here. Paul Ham's insightful book Kokoda, often drawing on new Japanese sources, should be read by all. Curtin clearly did stand up to Churchill for the benefit of Australia and the evidence is documented and overwhelming. As just one example, we know that Prime Minister Churchill ordered the diversion of Australian troops to Burma, without reference to Curtin, who immediately overturned Churchill's decision.

Churchill did suggest the withdrawal of two of three Australian divisions from the Middle East, not that he planned that they should return to Australia. As Day has written, it was Curtin, backed by Australian military chiefs, who insisted that the first responsibility of the only battle-hardened Australian troops was the defence of their own country and it was he who ensured that they arrived back in time to participate in it. As Day has written:

"It is simply wrong to argue, as he does, that it was Winston Churchill rather than John Curtin who was responsible for getting Australian troops home from the Middle East in 1942."

Dr Stanley correctly debunks a number of myths, such as the Kokoda campaign – solely of itself – saving Australia, and the bombing of Darwin being a prelude to invasion, but he takes the alleged “myth” factor to new, inaccurate lengths.

We are told the Memorial’s chief historian is researching a work “rethinking Australia and the second world war.” If this is to be the latest shot in the revisionist war in Australia, hopefully the Australian War Memorial as an institution will commit itself to accuracy and impartiality, free of any contemporary political considerations. If the Memorial is to maintain its credibility, it must, as an organisation, distance itself from revisionist theory. The new revisionist line, however unintentional, demeans John Curtin and the contribution of Australian Diggers, some of whom were brought back from overseas by John Curtin. Is this what we should come to expect from our national institution, the Australian War Memorial?

In talking of Australian history, I note that our history books do not appear to acknowledge the extent of Australia’s peace efforts and attempted intervention between Japan and the United States in late 1941; that is, Australia’s attempts to mediate between the two parties in the Washington talks and the fact that this was a two-pronged Australian strategy. The Curtin Government adopted this dual approach towards the Japanese through Tatsuo Kawai in Australia and via the Australian envoy Richard Casey who, at the eleventh hour, personally spoke to the two Japanese negotiators in the Japanese Embassy in Washington.

The US has always been dismissive about this attempted intervention and mediation. The Japanese, however, were not so dismissive. Katsushiro Narita, Ambassador to Australia in 1959, wrote of these Australian efforts: “...there were earnest attempts being made towards maintaining peace.” He acknowledged that foreign minister Herbert Evatt acted in concert with Casey “thus indirectly going to considerable lengths in order to facilitate the success of the US-Japan talks.”

When it mattered the Curtin Government became involved directly in discussions with Japan. Curtin and Evatt were not content to surrender Australia’s independence to be subservient to the major powers without a desperate, last-ditch diplomatic effort. That quest, however quixotic, unorthodox and perhaps naive, had to be made.

When at last Australia was consumed by war with Japan, Curtin and Evatt at least could resile themselves to having made every possible effort to explore the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Well might we ask; was that so wrong?

Tatsuo Kawai the man was charmed by John Curtin's humility, simplicity and honesty. That Kawai loved Australia and devoted his life to the memory of Curtin and to Japan-Australia trade and friendship is beyond doubt. After the war, as head of the Japan Australia Society, Kawai dedicated himself to trade and friendship between the two countries. Even on his death bed he goaded and urged friends to do more for the relationship with Australia. John Francis Curtin, son of the Prime Minister, told me that his father and Kawai had a close relationship. But Curtin himself didn't leave much of an indication of the friendship, other than to say one thing.

He told the journalist/historian Gavin Long that in Canberra on about November 29, 1941, when he asked Kawai "Is it to be war?" Kawai had responded with unbelievable frankness for a man who was soon to become the enemy. According to Curtin himself, Kawai replied: "I'm afraid it has gone too far; the momentum is too great." As Elsie Curtin later wrote, it gave the Prime Minister a flying start.

Remarkably, the Kawai and Curtin families maintained a friendly association that endured the war and lasted until 2001, when the Curtins' daughter Elsie went into a nursing home. This finally ended her contact with Masumi Kawai. Another great irony is that Kawai's son Masumi, following the urging of his father after the war, initiated huge iron ore mines in Western Australia as chief of Mitsui Australia. In the course of his work the son visited the Curtin's Cottesloe house on dozens of occasions. Tatsuo Kawai's only gain was personal satisfaction.

On a hot Sunday, March 8, in 1959, Elsie Curtin took Tatsuo Kawai to Karrakatta cemetery. Kawai knelt at John Curtin's grave, prayed and wept. What happened next would have made Curtin laugh, for it was quintessentially Australian. Kawai, thin and balding, plunged into the surf at Cottesloe Beach with the Curtin family, as related to me by Masumi Kawai.

Over 60 years after the death of John Curtin and the end of the Pacific war, now nothing will test the oft stated Australian attribute of tolerance more than considered judgement of Tatsuo Kawai's life and all that Kawai did, both to and for Australia.

This is a story of both wisdom and tolerance and I am humbled to have made the journey. Tatsuo Kawai had a credo of Australian friendship and trade which he remarkably held before, during and after the war. He wrote thus:

"If you head directly south of Japan, sitting practically equidistant from the equator as Japan is Australia, and it would be fair to say that, other than the waters of the Pacific Ocean, there are no other barriers in between."

## Bob Wurth

Queensland writer Bob Wurth's interest in the Asia-Pacific region goes back to 1970-72 when he lived in Port Moresby, travelling on assignment as a journalist throughout Papua New Guinea. He returned to Sydney in 1972, but travelled to Papua New Guinea frequently thereafter.

Bob Wurth was a foreign correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation based in Singapore between 1981 and 1985. He reported for ABC radio and television on major events in Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan and India. His assignments included the assassination of Benigno Aquino at Manila Airport in 1983 and Indira Gandhi in New Delhi in 1984.

He was ABC Manager for Asia in 1984 and 1985 and acted in that position in 1988. He later became Manager for Queensland for ABC radio and television, before taking up writing on a full-time basis in 1999. He had also worked as an ABC broadcast news consultant to the South African Broadcasting Corporation, in the lead up to that country's first democratic election, undertaking a major review of the SABC public information services. He also worked as a trainer-consultant to the National Broadcasting Corporation in Papua New Guinea.

He is the author of five books to date:

Justice in the Philippines, Father Brian Gore, the church, the state and the military, ABC Books, 1985.

Saving Australia, Curtin's secret peace with Japan, Lothian Books, 2006.

1942, Australia's greatest peril, Pan Macmillan, 2008.

Capturing Asia, ABC Books, 2010.

The Battle for Australia, Pan Macmillan, 2013.

In 2008, Bob Wurth donated his papers relating to his research for his book Saving Australia, Curtin's secret peace with Japan to the JCPML.

Bob Wurth's fifth book, The Battle for Australia, was published by Pan Macmillan in 2013 and [was launched](#) at the JCPML in November 2013.