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Japanese Scouts hail sailors' survival

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By **TOM VOGT** by Columbian staff writer

Courage should be honored, and compassion should be remembered.

And that's what a dozen people did Sunday at a Vancouver monument to three Japanese sailors. They saluted the courage of three survivors who had washed up on the Washington coast in 1833, and they remembered the compassion of those at Fort Vancouver who gave the castaways a chance to return home.

Eight Scout leaders from Japan visited the monument to the sailors Iwakichi, Kyukichi and Otokichi on the grounds of the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

"It's important to carry the story of young men's courage," said Tomoteru Yamada, a Scout leader and chairman of the executive board of Hyogo Prefecture. "I feel we should inherit that courage, and pass it along."

It's now part of the history of Fort Vancouver, said Tracy Fortmann, superintendent of the historic site.

"One of the most extraordinary stories we tell here is this story," Fortmann told the visitors, with interpreting help from Machiko O'Sullivan of Portland. "It's a story I believe binds our people together, one of endurance, courage, commitment and compassion. This is a story we must keep alive for you Japanese, and young Americans."

The story goes back to the Hojun-Maru, a Japanese ship that set sail with a cargo of rice and porcelain in 1832, then disappeared en route to what is now Tokyo. The people in Otokichi's hometown of Mihama assumed the ship and its 14-man crew had gone down in a winter storm and put up a memorial stone for him near a temple.

Actually, the ship was drifting helplessly with a broken rudder. After 14 months at sea, it landed on the northwest tip of Washington, near Cape Flattery. Iwakichi, Kyukichi and Otokichi who was only 14 years old were found by Makah Indians, and the news made its way to John McLoughlin, the Hudson's Bay Company's chief factor at Fort Vancouver.

McLoughlin had them brought to the fort, where they learned English, and then he got them passage on a ship to England. Otokichi was the only one who ever made it back to Japan, although he wound up working as a translator with British businessmen and naval officer and never resettled in his homeland.

In 1989, officials from Hyogo Prefecture presented the 2-ton monument to Vancouver as a gift to celebrate Washington's centennial. The monument, just west of the visitor's center at 1501 Evergreen Blvd., is a popular site for Japanese tourists, businessmen and school groups, Fortmann said.

The Japanese Scout leaders brought along another gift on this visit, a replica of the Hojun-Maru. They will present the replica of the sailors' ship this week to the Makah Cultural & Research Center, to the descendants of the Indians who sheltered the three castaways.

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Tracy Fortmann, superintendent of the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, exchanges gifts with Scout leaders from Japan at a monument honoring three Japanese sailors who came to Fort Vancouver in 1834. MIKE SALSBURY/The Columbian