

Nagasako Park (Imperial Navy Cemetery)

The Imperial Navy Cemetery was established in 1890. It was originally used as a burial site for sailors who lost their lives to disease while serving aboard Navy ships, and 157 sailors are buried there in individual graves. During the Meiji era (1868–1912), as Japan became involved in large-scale military conflicts such as the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), new monuments were dedicated to specific warships and inscribed with the names of all the soldiers who had died while serving aboard them.

The cemetery was damaged by air raids during World War II and then by the Makurazaki Typhoon (Typhoon Ida) of 1945. After the war's end, the site became national property, and repair work was begun. In 1947, the area was reopened to the public as Nagasako Park. As the city did not have the resources to maintain the property after its renovation, local Navy veteran volunteers took on the task of upkeeping the grounds. In 1971, these volunteers established the Society for the Preservation of the Kure Naval Cemetery, which continues to care for the property. Over the years, more monuments were erected in the park, including one dedicated to the battleship *Yamato* and the soldiers who perished while serving aboard her. Other monuments are dedicated to members of particular units or list the names of sailors and soldiers who gave up their lives while serving on specific ships or islands. Though the monuments from older conflicts are large, the newer monuments, such as those that honor soldiers killed during World War II, are smaller in order to conserve space. This shift indicates the unprecedented loss of life during that war.

One of the tombstones in the cemetery belongs to a British sailor. After the formation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, the Japanese Imperial Navy and Britain's Royal Navy maintained a close relationship. As part of this relationship, a British battleship visited Kure in 1907. During the journey to Kure, a 19-year-old British sailor named George Tibbins fell overboard and drowned. The Royal Navy placed a tombstone dedicated to him in the Kure Naval Cemetery that same year. After the end of World War II, a few citizens of Kure destroyed Tibbins's tombstone in retaliation for the bombings the city had endured. The majority of Kure's residents, however, felt this action was unjust. They collected money to rebuild the monument and surround it with a metal enclosure to protect it from future vandals. The tomb is maintained by the cemetery's volunteer organization to this day. The Tibbins monument and other tombstones are also regularly decorated with flowers by students from Nagasako Elementary School, and every year on the autumnal equinox, the Society for the Preservation of the Kure Naval Cemetery and

the city of Kure hold a joint memorial service for those who died as casualties of war.