



## **Australian High Commission**

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### **Malaysia**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **AUSTRALIA HONOURS WAR HEROES IN SANDAKAN**


**Sandakan, 15 August 2024** – Each year on 15 August the community of Sandakan comes together to commemorate Sandakan Day. The annual service sees veterans, families as well as local and foreign dignitaries gather in Sandakan to honour the Australian and British soldiers who were held there as prisoners of war between 1942 and 1945. Sandakan Day also commemorates the sacrifice of the local people of Sabah, many of whom risked severe punishment, and in some cases their lives, to help the prisoners.

Of the 2,434 prisoners only six – all Australians – escaped the brutal conditions and were cared for by the local Sabahans.

This year's ceremony in Sandakan Memorial Park marks the 79th anniversary of Sandakan Day. Official guests included the **Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia, Her Excellency Ms Danielle Heinecke**; **Sabah State Assistant Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment Yang Berhormat Datuk Joniston Bangkuai**; **President of the Sandakan Municipal Council, Mr Henry Idol**; **Chief Executive Officer of the Sabah Tourism Board, Mr Julinus Jeffery Jimit**; and the **Acting Deputy British High Commissioner to Malaysia, His Excellency Mr Tom Shepherd**.

In her commemorative address, **Ms Heinecke** said "In places like Sandakan, I am reminded of how great the reach of conflict was, how far away from home Australians served and died. Sandakan Day is also a day of reflection as we remember the sacrifices of local Sabahans who came to our rescue. Australia and Malaysia have a deep history of partnership, support and respect, and I am pleased the memory of Sandakan lives on, across generations."

This year, the Australian Defence Force's Rifle Company Butterworth 144 followed in the footsteps of the of the fallen, taking part in a guided walk over four days on a portion of the Sandakan Death March track. **Captain Luke Gollschewski, second-in-command of Rifle Company Butterworth 144**, said "It was a challenge for me, and for the rest of the company.



However, the conditions forced us to reflect upon those who had come before us, and just how deeply they suffered at the hands of occupying forces during WWII.”

Australia and Malaysia’s defence relationship is long and enduring. Beginning in World War II, through the Malayan Emergency and Konfrontasi, today it is reflected in the extensive Malaysia-Australia Joint Defence Program and the Five Power Defence Arrangements.

Ms Heinecke added, “Next year, 2025 will not only mark the 80th anniversary of Sandakan Day, but also the 70th anniversary of Australia-Malaysia diplomatic ties and an opportunity to reflect on the strength and deep history of our partnership. Australia and Malaysia are longstanding partners and friends, and we look forward to celebrating the deep connections between our peoples, and continue to support one another’s aspirations for economic development, and shared interests for an open, stable and prosperous region.”

The Australian High Commission in Malaysia also extends its thanks to the Sandakan Municipal Council for arranging this year’s service, and to all community members who support the service each year and keep the memories alive.

Media note: Imagery will be available via –

- Sandakan Day 2024 Imagery: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Ji6-OEveqx9tQ7bEzEDNNDXqN5Y0tAYA?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Ji6-OEveqx9tQ7bEzEDNNDXqN5Y0tAYA?usp=drive_link)
- ADF Sandakan Death March Imagery: <https://mediahub.fotoware.com.au/fotoweb/albums/Zq-AQLpK5NPxQtd9/>