



Media Release

Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson
Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC
Special Minister of State

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SUFFERING OF SANDAKAN POWs REMEMBERED

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson, today urged all Australians to remember Sandakan Day and especially those Australians who suffered acts of cruelty during the Second World War.

"Today we mark Sandakan Day – a day to remember those who were held as Prisoners of War (POW) at Sandakan in Borneo. More than 2,400 Australian and British prisoners were sent to Sandakan Camp in 1942. By the end of the war, only six, all Australians, were still alive." Senator Ronaldson said.

"During the Second World War, more than 22,000 Australians became POWs in south-east Asia, of these men, more than 8,000 died."

At the Sandakan POW camp, the prisoners lived in appalling conditions. Described by the official Australian war time historian as 'walking skeletons', they were starved, mistreated and repeatedly subjected to merciless lashings at the hands of their captors.

Weak and sick from years of neglect and abuse, most of the surviving prisoners were forced to walk to Ranau on what would become known as the Sandakan death marches. The first death march, left Sandakan in late January 1945. A second group departed in May. When the second group arrived at Ranau, they found only a handful of men from the original group alive.

By August, all the men from these two groups, except for two small parties who escaped, had perished through malnutrition and disease or were killed or died as a result of beatings. A third group departed Sandakan in June, none of them made it to Ranau. The few who remained at Ranau after this group departed were either killed or left to die in the elements.

"I encourage all Australians to take a moment today, to remember the POWs who lost their lives at the Sandakan camp and in the Sandakan death marches. Their story is heartbreaking and their sacrifice will never be forgotten." Senator Ronaldson said.

For more information on Australian POWs during the Second World War visit www.wv2australia.gov.au/behindwire

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