

IN OUR NEIGHBOURS' SOIL OUR ANZACS SLEEP

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ABSTRACT

Mounted in the Sarawak Heroes' Memorial Park in Kuching is a large black marble plaque, installed on 29 August 2016, which honours the Australian Service personnel who died during the period of the Indonesian Confrontation with Malaysia. Incomplete records available at the time led to this plaque containing several errors and omissions. Three years later, as a member of the South Australia and Northern Territory Branch of the National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association of Australia Inc, I was invited to deliver a commemorative address for Malaya-Borneo Veterans' Day in Kuching on 29 August 2019. The opportunity was taken to extensively research the Australian fallen, in order to propose a series of amendments, and a new plaque was installed prior to this ceremony. My address drew attention to the 50 Australian fallen from the Malayan wars who remain buried overseas in the soil of our neighbours, acknowledging Malaysia and Singapore for looking after our Anzacs. In particular, of the Australians who died on operational service during Confrontation, I noted that eight died in Sarawak and a further three died after being evacuated from Sarawak. This paper includes this commemorative address, followed by an analysis of the circumstances of each of the eleven Australian defenders of Sarawak in 1965-66 who lost their lives. Concluding this research, the graves of the Australian fallen in Kranji Military Cemetery in Singapore were visited and photographed in December 2019, including the four Australian soldiers who died in Sarawak and remain buried overseas. The significance of the 2019 ceremony in Kuching has been heightened by the inability of Australian veterans to schedule any further reunion visits because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Keywords: Confrontation, Veterans, Commemoration, Australia, Sarawak, Sacrifice

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