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In Our Neighbours' Soil Our Anzacs Sleep

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ABSTRACT

The Sarawak Heroes Memorial Park in Kuching contains a black marble plaque, installed on 29 August 2016, honouring the Australian military personnel who died during the Indonesian Confrontation with Malaysia. Incomplete records however, led to this plaque containing minor errors and omissions. Three years later, as a member of the South Australia and Northern Territory Branch of the National Malaya and 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. This presented the opportunity to extensively research the fallen, and a new plaque was installed prior to this ceremony. My address, included here, drew attention to the 50 Australian fallen from the Malayan wars who remain buried overseas, acknowledging Malaysia and Singapore for looking after our 'Anzacs'. In particular, of the Australians who died during Confrontation, I noted that eight died in Sarawak (while 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 veterans to schedule any further reunion visits because of the coronavirus pandemic.

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

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INTRODUCTION

At the Sarawak Heroes Memorial Park in Kuching on 29 August 2019, I had the privilege of delivering a commemorative address for Malaya-Borneo Veterans Day. This address was significant as it honoured the Australians who died on operational service in Sarawak, or after being evacuated from Sarawak, during the Indonesian Confrontation with Malaysia, and for the first time drew attention to the 50 Australian fallen from the Malayan wars who remain buried overseas.

In 2011, the Australian Department of Veterans' Affairs had designated 31 August (the date of Malayan Independence in 1957) as the official date of commemoration for the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation with Malaysia. Since that time, the South Australia and Northern Territory Branch of the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association Australia Inc (NMBVAA) has held a Malaya-Borneo Veterans Day commemoration in Adelaide, South Australia each year towards the end of August. They have also held ceremonies in Kuching in August 2016 and August 2019 to mark the anniversaries of the end of the Malayan Emergency in 1960 and Confrontation in 1966.

The 2019 ceremony was conducted jointly by Australian and New Zealand veteran groups in the presence of the Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia Mr Andrew Golezinski AM and the New Zealand High Commissioner Mr Hunter Nottage. The Borneo Post reported:

Army veterans from Australia and New Zealand gathered at the Heroes' Cemetery, Jalan Taman Budaya here yesterday to remember their comrades who laid down their lives during the Confrontation with Indonesia.¹

The NMBVAA and its New Zealand equivalent, the Malayan Veterans Association, have played a most important role in maintaining and raising public awareness of the two-post war campaigns on the Malay Peninsula and in Borneo, while at the same time supporting the families and veterans of these undeclared wars. The close relationship stems from a time when New Zealand almost joined the Australian federation in 1901, and extends to the present day where we continue to enjoy a comprehensive bilateral relationship and security partnership. Australia and New Zealand have a proud tradition of joint military deployments, beginning with the combined Australasian force which landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915 which had the title 'Australian and New Zealand Army Corps', and was designated by the acronym 'ANZAC'. This established the spirit of ANZAC,

¹ Borneo Post, 30 August 2019.

