

David Harris

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty
Minister for Gaming and Racing
Minister for Veterans
Minister for Medical Research
Minister for the Central Coast



Media Release

80th Anniversary of the Cowra Breakout

Sunday, 4 August 2024

Minister for Veterans David Harris is attending a series of events hosted by Cowra Council to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Cowra Breakout.

In the early hours of Saturday 5 August 1944, more than 1,000 Japanese Second World War prisoners staged a breakout from their compound near Cowra, in the NSW Central West.

Sentries opened fire but several hundred prisoners escaped into open country, while others who remained set fire to the camp buildings.

In August 1944 there were 2,223 Japanese prisoners of war in Australia, including 1,104 housed in Camp B of No. 12 Prisoner of War Compound near Cowra, guarded by the 22nd Garrison Battalion.

On the night of the breakout three Australian soldiers were killed and another three were wounded. Privates B.G. Hardy and R. Jones, who were overwhelmed while manning a machine gun post, were posthumously awarded the George Cross.

A fourth Australian, Lieutenant Harry Doncaster was killed when ambushed during the recapture of the prisoners.

In the nine days following the breakout 334 prisoners were retaken, with Japanese casualties totalling over 230 killed and 108 wounded.

Australia and Japan now share a special relationship, strategically, economically, culturally, and more broadly through our continuing cooperation between our defence forces.

The Cowra Japanese Gardens is a lasting symbol of our ongoing friendship and peace.

A number of events throughout today (Sunday 4 August) and tomorrow (Monday 5 August) centre around a special commemoration at the site of the POW compound at 1.30am Monday, the time of the prisoner breakout 80 years ago.

Today's events include a Peace Bell ceremony and torch run, a lantern parade, a community event at the breakout site and a Mayoral Dinner.

Tomorrow a media breakfast will take place at the Cowra Japanese Gardens Café, followed by a wreath laying and a morning tea.

The full itinerary is available on the Cowra Council website: [Cowra Breakout 80th Anniversary | Cowra Council](#).

Minister for Veterans David Harris said:

"This weekend is a special time in our nation's military history, especially in New South Wales, as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Cowra Outbreak.

“Eighty years ago, during the peak of the Second World War, enemies battled right here in Cowra.

“Hundreds of Japanese prisoners of war housed in Cowra escaped into the countryside after breaking through wire fences with knives and improvised clubs. Sadly, four Australian soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice, and more than 230 Japanese prisoners were killed in the aftermath.

“I would like to thank Cowra Council for leading the way in acknowledging this momentous time and helping to foster unity between Cowra and Japan, and our nation and Japan.”

MEDIA: Matt Porter | Minister Harris | 0407 239 578