

# Approval for re-enactment of escape from Japanese invasion

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A plan to re-enact part of the escape from Hong Kong to China by a group of soldiers during the second world war is finally set to get off the ground after receiving official support from the central government.

The escape started in Ap Lei Chau on the day Hong Kong fell to the Japanese - Christmas Day 1941 - and ended 5,120 kilometres and nearly two months later in Rangoon, now called Yangon.



Richard Hide, chairman of the Hong Kong Escape Re-enactment Organisation, said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had granted approval for two official groups - the China Culture Development Association and the China Cultural Global Foundation - to help with the re-enactment this Christmas. They will help with arrangement of visas, transport and accommodation.

This was the highest level of official support from the Chinese side following endorsement by the Duke of Edinburgh in Britain in July. In a letter to the organisation, many members of which are descendants of soldiers who made the trek, the duke praised China for the escape's success, saying that under the leadership of Admiral Chan Chak - sent by Chiang Kai-shek to help the city's British and allied defenders - the lives of 68 men were saved.

He also complimented the efforts in re-enacting the trek, which started on the day governor Sir Mark Young surrendered to Lieutenant General Takashi Sakai.

The *South China Morning Post* ([SEHK: 0583, announcements, news](#)) reported last year that the descendants of the escape party found one another through a website launched in 1996 by Hide, son of one of the escapees, Petty Officer Stephen "Buddy" Hide. Richard Hide - together with Admiral Chan's twin sons Duncan, who died recently, and Donald, as well as other descendants - decided to re-enact the escape to commemorate the Sino-British joint military action, and the friendship between the Chinese and British people.

After three months of negotiations, Hide was glad that the re-enactment plan had finally received official recognition from Beijing. He said help from the Chinese side on visa and transport arrangements was crucial to retrace the escape route, which bypassed immigration checkpoints. His organisation had already reached an agreement with the two mainland groups.

"We are very proud that we have got this far. The first time I met Donald [Chan] 10 years ago, we had no idea we would've found so many people and earned this much interest. It has exceeded all our expectations," he said.

Related events will begin with a seminar on December 23 and the opening of an exhibition on the escape at the Museum of Coastal Defence on Christmas Eve. A party of between 70 and 80, mainly descendants of the escapees, plan to embark on a four-day journey to re-enact the first leg of the escape route from Ap Lei Chau on December 26, after a memorial service and dinner on Christmas Day.

The plan is to travel by boat from Hong Kong to Nanao, stopping at Ping Chau for a meal. The party will spend two nights in Nanao, and meet survivors and descendants of the East River Column guerillas, who gave food and intelligence to the escapees. On December 28, the party will go to Huizhou, which was known as "Free China" during the war. Hide said the official trip would end in Huizhou but some of the party would continue the trip to Shaoguan.

The escapees travelled for nearly two months, arriving in Yangon on February 14.