

THE FURPHY

ARMADALE SUB-BRANCH OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

November 2025 Edition



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General Meetings:

Second Sunday of the month at 1100hrs

Annual General Meeting:

Second Sunday of September

Committee Positions

Armada Sub-Branch Committee	
President	Mr Mike Fairweather
Vice President	Mr Bob Giles
Secretary	Ms Carol King
Treasurer	Mrs Cheryl Cowie
Warden	Mr Graeme Cowie
Warden	Mr Keith Northcott
Membership Officer	Secretary
Committee	Mr Geoff Scott
Committee	Ms Fiona Boyle
Advocate / Welfare Officer	Mr Brent Errington
Bar Manager	Mr Mike Fairweather

ADVOCATE / WELFARE

Brent Errington “Erro” is available as follows:

At the Armadale RSL Sub-Branch:

Monday:

by appointment only

Thursday:

between 0900 - 1400hrs

Weekday Contact Details:

Mobile: 0407 449 150

e-mail: welfare2@armadalersl.com.au

Diary Dates for November

<i>Day</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Time</i>
Sunday	2nd	Social Committee Meeting	1100
Tuesday	5th	Management Committee Meeting	1100
Sunday	9th	General Meeting	1100
Tuesday	11th	Remembrance Day	1050



REAR VIEW MIRROR

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hi Members,

It's been very hectic this month in the lead up to Remembrance Day. Apart from that, our new gate and fencing are nearing completion. This, plus a new path on the Western side of the building along with the plants on the compound boundary have been donated by the Metconnx project and for that we extend our sincere appreciation to all involved.

They have also approached the Management team regarding having a mural painted on the west wall. They wish to include art students from Armadale Senior High School to work on this legacy project being offered to the Sub-Branch at no cost.

We are working with both parties currently but are unable to move forward until we have in principle agreement from members at the November General Meeting that the work proceeds.

Due to other commitments, I will be an apology at the November GM but have every confidence in our Vice President, Bob Giles to chair the meeting in my absence.

That's all from me for now,

Mike Fairweather

President

Returned Services League Armadale Sub-Branch

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1 Commerce Avenue Armadale WA 6112 | PO Box 697 Armadale WA 6992

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The Dildozer

LEST WE FORGET



Remembrance Day

**The Armadale RSL Sub-Branch will be hosting
a Community Remembrance Day Service**

Venue: ***Memorial Park, Armadale***
Date: ***Tuesday, 11th November***
Time: ***10:45am***

**The RSL Bar will be open from
11:00am with a Sausage Sizzle lunch
on sale from 12 noon**

Public Welcome

Secretary's Notes

Hi Everyone,

We will be holding a Members Only Lunch on 30th November. The menu is published elsewhere in this edition of the Furphy. Names will be taken from 12th October to 16th November.

As a token of our appreciation to Members for supporting us during the year this is heavily subsidised by the Sub-Branch. The charge to financial members is \$15 including dessert, but if you do not pre-book, we will be unable to serve you on the day.

Those of you who attend our General Meetings will already be aware that now the railway land is open to the public, we require additional external security cameras on the western side of our building.

Unfortunately, this means that the hard drive for our data storage will not cope under the 28 day Liquor and Gaming guidelines so this also requires an upgrade.

The value is in the region of \$8,000. Over the past couple of months, I have exhausted all possibilities to obtain financial assistance by way of grants. This is with the exception of having a \$1,000 being granted by the City of Armadale towards the upgrade and for that we are extremely grateful.

All things Remembrance Day are getting much closer including holding the stalls, so the roster asking for names is now on the Notice Board. As this edition goes to print, we have not yet filled the roster, so we ask that you seriously consider putting your name down for a couple of hours.

That's all from me for this edition.

Carol King

Sub-Branch Secretary

e-mail: secretary@armadalersl.com.au

Mobile Ham Radio



Membership Update

As at 31st October, 2025:

Service Members:	139
Affiliate Members:	42
Social Members:	<u>82</u>
Total:	<u>263</u>

Renewals are due on 31st December, and forms are on the Notice Board, or alternatively there is one towards the end of this Furphy.

Carol King

Tel: 9497 1972

e-mail: secretary@armadalersl.com.au



Happy Birthday!

November Service Members:

Bauld	Mr	John	15/11	Enright	Dr	Leo	24/11
Escott	Mr	Gary	01/11	Evans	Mr	Steve	04/11
Fairweather	Mr	Michael	15/11	Ferrari	Mr	Michael	02/11
Gillam	Mr	Gordon	29/11	Grimes	Mr	Wayne	14/11
Harding	Mr	Andrew	01/11	Henderson	Mr	Richard	03/11
Jonsson	Mr	Rodney	25/11	Palmer	Mr	Glen	11/11

November Affiliate Members:

Matthews	Mr	Russel	24/11	Murphy	Mr	John	03/11
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November Social Members:

Beard	Mr	Malcolm	09/11	Bowen	Mr	John	28/11
Buley	Mr	Brenton	16/11	Choo	Miss	Jackie	02/11
Evans	Mrs	Maralyn	16/11	Hodges	Mr	Clayton	03/11
Lewis	Ms	Susan	12/11	Miller	Mrs	Maria	20/11
Neasmith	Ms	Amanda	22/11	Skehan	Ms	Jackie	13/11
Stenning	Mr	Gordon	05/11	Thompson	Mrs	Julie	18/11

If there are any errors or anyone has been missed off the list, please advise

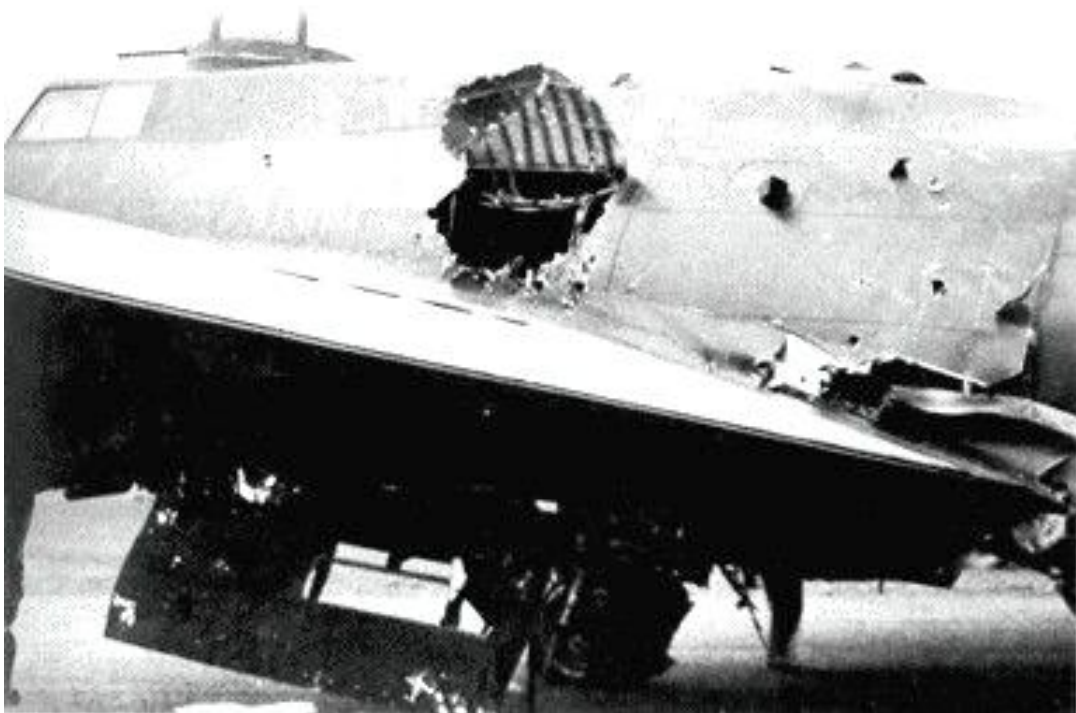
The Secretary (Interim Membership Officer)

These members may collect a free drink of their choice during the month

We hope you have a very special Birthday



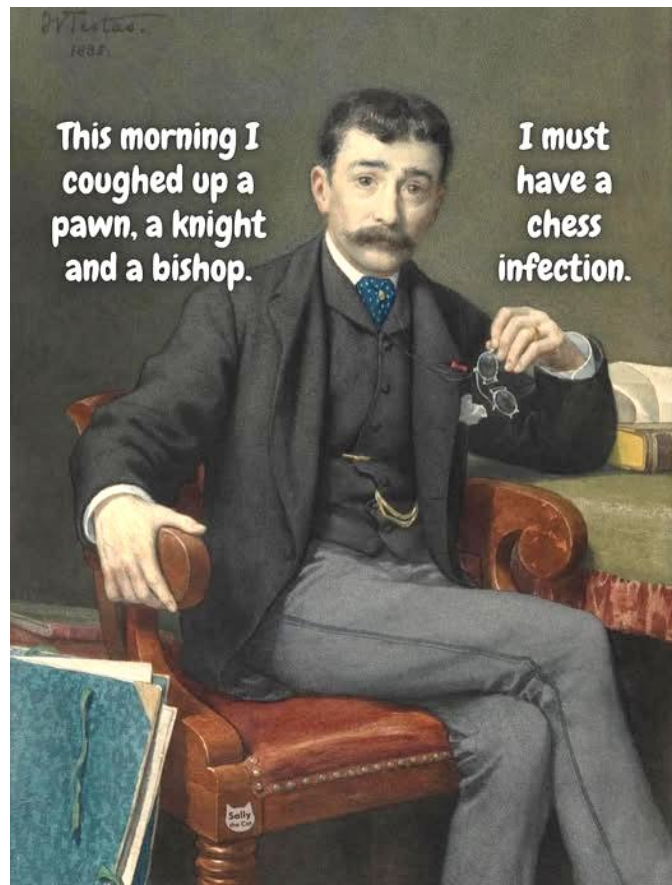
A battery of M7 Priests from 33rd Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, near Hermanville-sur-Mer, June 6, 1944.



A heavily damaged B-17 after returning to England. The aircraft suffered a direct hit near the radio compartment, blowing the radio operator clear of the aircraft and causing heavy damage; it landed with a shredded main tyre, jammed ball turret, and a live bomb still on board.



**Display of 20,000 poppies
arranged in the shape of
Lancaster Bomber**



MEMBERS LUNCHEON

Sunday 30th November, 2025
(1230 hours)



Roast: ***Beef or Pork***

Dessert: ***Sticky Date Pudding***
 Choc Mint Cheesecake
 or Apple Crumble with Custard

FINANCIAL MEMBERS ONLY

\$15

Book and Pay by Close of Business 16th November



The French cruiser Marseillaise burning and sinking at Toulon, France, late November 1942. The scuttling of the French fleet at Toulon was carried out to prevent the ships from falling into German hands after the Axis occupation of Vichy France.



William Touton who flew 35 missions in the 384th Bomb Group. His B-17 was named "Damn Yankee".

Bar Manager's Report

G'day All,

I had a surprise call from CUB during the week and with our loyalty points we have been gifted 3 free kegs in preparation for Remembrance Day. Yes, sometimes we do get good news !

We are still operating within our expected profit margin so there's no indication that the cost of drinks will be going up in the short term.

Cheers for now,

Stormy

**Just tried a
frog-flavored beer.**

**You can really taste
the hops.**

Borneo

Prelude to invasion: covert operations before the re-occupation of Northwest Borneo, 1944-45

In 1945 the task of retaking from the Japanese the former British Borneo territories of Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo (Sabah) was entrusted to the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). The 20th and 24th Brigades of the 9th Division launched an amphibious offensive, codenamed OBOE 6, with landings in the Brunei Bay area and Labuan Island in June. The groundwork for OBOE 6 began several months prior to its execution. In March 1945, members of the Australian Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) were dropped behind enemy lines in the Upper Baram and Trusan valleys in Sarawak, and at Labuk Bay in North Borneo. The objective of the SRD was to gather intelligence, survey the terrain, and organize local resistance - in anticipation of the imminent AIF invasion. This article examines the activities of the SRD in preparing the stage for the launch of OBOE 6, and evaluates the contribution of SRD covert operations to the effective implementation of the invasion plans.

The war against Japan and the Borneo campaigns

The island of Borneo, with its oilfields and strategic location for the offensive against British Malaya and Dutch Java, was one of the prime targets of Japan's military offensive of 1941-42. The Japanese systematically and swiftly secured their objectives in Borneo during the early months of their 'push' into the resource-rich Southern Area (South-East Asia) following Pearl Harbor. The Miri and Seria oilfields in Sarawak and Brunei respectively were captured without much fuss in less than a fortnight of their initial landings off the north-west coast of Borneo in mid-December 1941. Before the close of January 1942, the Dutch oilfields at Tarakan and Balikpapan were under Japanese control. By 1943 Bornean oil was contributing to the Japanese war machine.

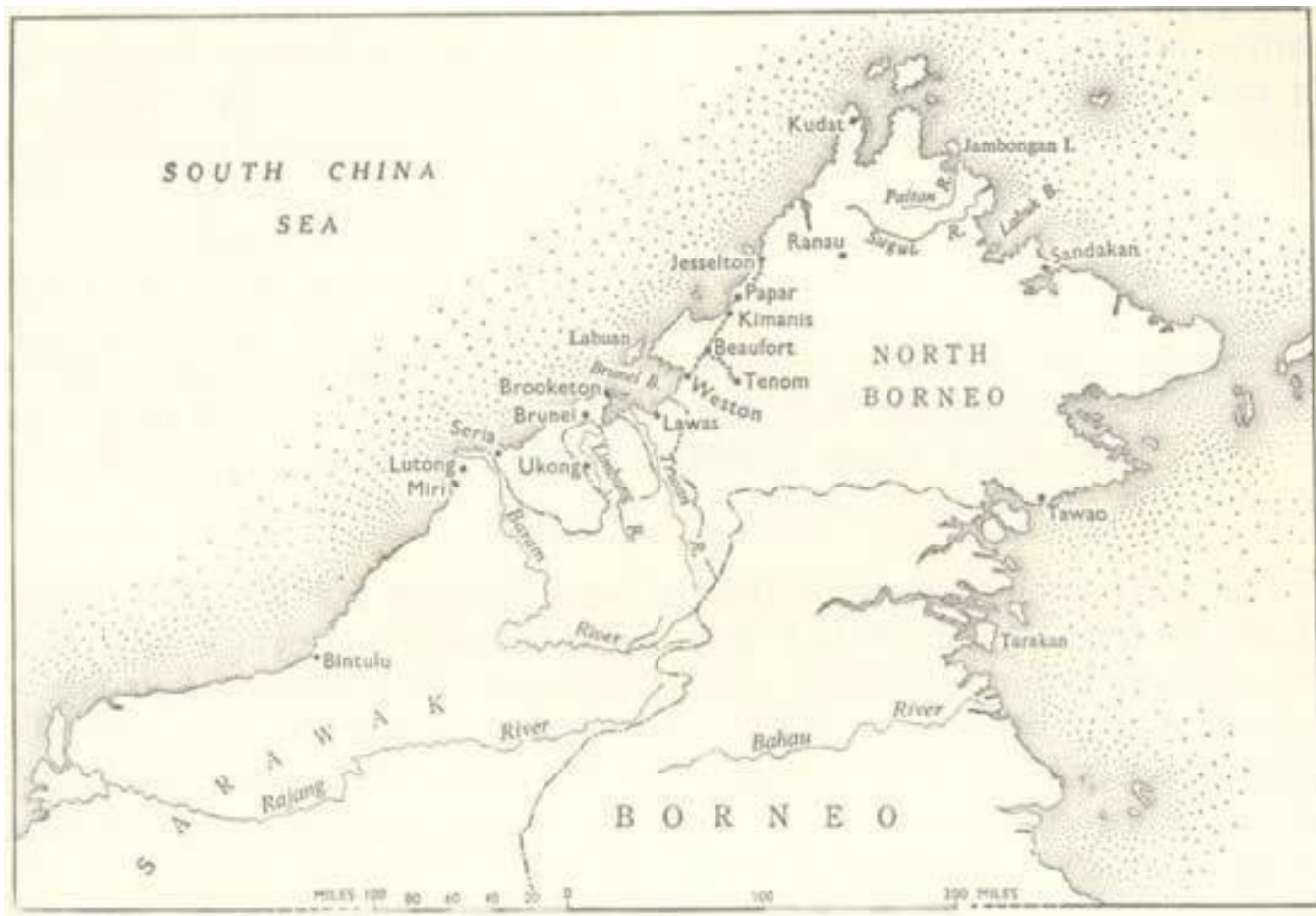
The latter part of 1944, however, witnessed the increasing effectiveness of the American navy in cutting off Japanese shipping lines between the home islands and the Southern Area. Moreover, Allied bombing raids were continuously carried out on oilfields and other strategic areas of Borneo from Australia. As the American offensive gained ground in the Philippines, the Japanese home islands increasingly lost their links with sources of oil supply in Borneo.

The island of Borneo came within the scope of operations of the South-West Pacific Area (SWPA) under the command of the American general, Douglas MacArthur. Despite its oilfields, Borneo did not feature high on MacArthur's list of priorities. He was obsessively determined to re-take the Philippines at all costs, arguing that an American occupation would hastened the defeat of Japan through cutting off the Japanese supply line from its Southern Area. More importantly, MacArthur saw his return to the Philippines – which he left hurriedly in early 1942 for Australia – as a means of restoring American prestige and honour. It was an apparent case of political expediency overriding military strategy.

In order to facilitate his reconquest of the Philippines, MacArthur struck a deal with the Dutch that he be given "complete authority in the East Indies during any military operations". In return, he promised to restore Dutch authority in their colonies as rapidly as possible. Therefore, the recapture of the Dutch East Indies, particularly Java, became part of MacArthur's plans. The seizure of Borneo was to offer bases to launch his offensive against Java. Furthermore, MacArthur argued that the Bornean oilfields would be denied the enemy and instead deployed to Allied advantage.

Nonetheless MacArthur had no intention of committing American land forces in the Borneo campaign. Instead, Australian troops would spearhead the offensive there, with landings planned at Tarakan, Brunei Bay and Labuan Island, and Balikpapan – in that order. The Australian Army had ample American naval and air support, and also from the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), for amphibious operations. The 1st Australian Corps, consisting of the 7th and 9th AIF Divisions under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Leslie Morshead, was entrusted with the Borneo operations.

The reconquest of Borneo was the second phase of the MONTCLAIR operation which aimed at reoccupying the southern Philippines, British North Borneo, and large areas of the Dutch East Indies. Out of the planned six OBOE operations, three only were approved by the CCS and subsequently implemented in mid-1945: OBOE 1 (Tarakan) was launched on 1 May; OBOE 6 (British North Borneo) on 10 June; and OBOE 2 (Balikpapan) on 1 July. Overall, all three operations achieved their objectives.



Map of North Borneo and Sarawak area

The Australian 9th Division (less the 26th Brigade) under Major General G. F. Wootten executed OBOE 6 with landings at the Brunei Bay area and Labuan Island. The prime objective was to secure the vicinity around Brunei Bay to provide for the establishment of a naval base, as well as accessibility to oil and rubber resources of Brunei, northeastern Sarawak, and North Borneo. Brigadier S. H. W. C. Porter and his 24th Brigade were entrusted with the re-occupation of Labuan. The task of securing the Brunei-Muara area was the responsibility of the 20th Brigade under Brigadier W. J. V. Windeyer. A supporting naval force under Vice-Admiral Dan Barbey, and the RAAF's 1st Tactical Air Force, offered ample bombardment and cover for the amphibious landings.

Within four days of the landings on 10 June 1945, all the initial targets of OBOE 6 were attained. By mid-July the AIF were greatly involved in civic action while their military role was increasingly becoming redundant.

Laying the groundwork: the "Borneo project"

The idea of sending a handful of European officers deep into the interior of Borneo and behind Japanese lines, with the objective of organizing the indigenous inhabitants to conduct a guerrilla war against vital enemy targets, namely the oil installations, was discussed early within Allied intelligence circles. These proposals, collectively referred to as "The Borneo Project", sowed the seeds of what became the covert operations undertaken by the Australian Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) in North Borneo and northeastern Sarawak during the months leading to the launching of OBOE 6.

As early as December 1941, there was a proposal for a scheme utilizing guerilla tactics in Sarawak "to make periodic raids on the oilfields [namely at Miri] from the interior and prevent the Japanese from making effective use of them". Second Lieutenant P. M. Synge of the British Intelligence Corps based in Oxford, England, proposed that "a force of 500 men or more if necessary, skilled in forest-craft, could be raised from the Long Houses of the Baram, Tinfar [Tinjar] and Niah rivers and organised into an effective guerilla force'. Benefiting from his participation in the Oxford Sarawak Expedition of 1932, Synge had knowledge of the terrain and of the inhabitants of northeastern Sarawak. He admitted, however, that such a force was "unlikely to be able to effect recapture of or to hold the oilfields"; nonetheless the continuous commando-style raids would "do much destructive work".

Following an interview with Intelligence officers from the War Office, Synge, as requested, submitted a memorandum outlining in detail his scheme of guerilla activity aimed at denying the enemy the full utilization of the Miri oil installations. By mid-February the following year, Synge's Sarawak scheme was apparently considered "impracticable" for the time being.

Meanwhile, attempts were made to contact other members of the Oxford Expedition, particularly the expedition leader, Tom Harrisson. By early July 1942, Harrisson submitted proposals that, in essence and general outline, did not differ from Synge's, with the notable exception that the former placed more emphasis on the Seria rather than the Miri oilfields. Furthermore, Harrisson drew attention to the importance of and the need to win "face" for the Allies.

The value on morale and confidence in the victory of Allied Nations would be immensely increased both throughout the Pacific and in China by the news that we were doing something even if slight in this area, that we were on the offensive as well as the defensive.

Another proposal from Captain D. L. Leach envisaged the landing in central Borneo of several ex-Brooke officers of the Sarawak civil service and medical and wireless personnel "to establish W/T [wireless/radio transmission] communication and to contact free Europeans and local natives likely to be still loyal". Their tasks would be to organize the natives and Chinese in preparation for assisting an Allied invasion, to undertake raids against Japanese outposts, and, if necessary, to construct temporary landing grounds. Leach also identified three main areas where anti-Japanese uprisings could be launched: the Baram and Tinjar rivers, inhabited by the Kayans and Kenyahs; the Rejang basin above Kapit, peopled mostly by Ibans; and the Iban heartland of the Second Division (the Rejang River eastwards to the Sadong River).

It was unclear how seriously the above-mentioned three proposals were viewed by Allied military planners at the initial stage. At least Harrisson's proposal drew this rather encouraging response:

The scheme sounds "wild-cat" but is the sort of thing that must be tried and might come off ... The enterprising individual should be given a run. The British Empire is foundering in the shoals of caution, rather than breaking on the rocks of disaster.

It is evident from correspondence between London and Melbourne that the various schemes proposed for Sarawak were not wholly shelved but apparently put on hold during 1942 and 1943. Meanwhile the search for personnel "with experience and real knowledge [of] British North Borneo and Sarawak" continued to be of high priority. It was not until March 1945, with the launching of SEMUT operations by the SRD, that the ideas and suggestions put forth by Synge, Harrisson and Leach were translated into action.

Covert operations in Northwest Borneo: AGAS and SEMUT

The Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) was an Australian outfit directly responsible to General Sir Thomas Blamey, Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces (AMF), based at Allied Land Headquarters in Melbourne. SRD was a cover name for Special Operations Australia (SOA) that had moved out of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB), and was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel P. J. F. Chapman-Walker.

The SRD implemented the Borneo Project in a series of long-term operations codenamed AGAS and SEMUT in North Borneo and Sarawak respectively. These SRD operations laid the groundwork to a certain extent, thereby paving the way for the eventual invasion in mid-1945 at the Brunei Bay-Labuan Island area.

Basically, SRD operations focussed on two main objectives: the gathering of intelligence and organizing (including training and arming) the local inhabitants into resistance groups to wage guerrilla warfare.

The precursors to AGAS and SEMUT were PYTHON 1 and 2 carried out in North Borneo in the vicinity of Labian Point. PYTHON 1, led by Major F. G. L. Chester with landings in early October 1943, undertook the task of reporting on Japanese sea-traffic in the Sibutu Passage and the Balabac Strait of the Sulu Sea. Chester also provided support for a band of Filipino guerrillas under the command of an American officer, Captain J. A. Hamner. In the later part of January 1944, Bill Jenkins headed PYTHON 2 with the objective of organizing the native population for guerrilla warfare. These early efforts did not bear any significant results.

More than a year passed before the first of several AGAS missions were launched in North Borneo. AGAS 1 and 2 were carried out prior to OBOE 6. In early March 1945, Chester commanded AGAS 1 in a landing near Labuk Bay, and in less than a week radio contact had been made with the Dutch station at Batchelor and the SRD personnel at Leanyer. A field headquarters was established at Sungei Sungei. Furthermore, drop zones (DZs) for stores were located at Jambongan Island in late April and early May. A central signal station was established at Lokopas, and a hospital for the native inhabitants on Jambongan Island. Two months later, AGAS 2 led by Major R. G. P. N. Combe, the pre-war district officer of Kudat, landed at Paitan Bay. Combe organized guerrilla activity in the Pitas area and at the same time established an intelligence network. AGAS 3, under Chester, focussed on the Jesselton-Keningau-Beaufort sector. This project incorporated STALLION Phase IV (explained below) with proposed long-term objectives.

Meanwhile, in Sarawak, plans were in motion for SRD groups to be parachuted into the mountainous hinterland of Brunei Bay. The initial designated target areas were the headwaters of the Baram, Limbang, and Trusan; later, the areas of operation expanded into the Padas valley of North Borneo, southwards into territories of former Dutch Borneo, and southeastwards to cover the Upper Rejang. These reconnaissance missions were codenamed SEMUT under the overall command of Major G. S. ("Toby") Carter. However, as the situation developed, the SEMUT operations were divided into three distinct parties under individual commanders: SEMUT 1 under Major Tom Harrisson; SEMUT 2 led by Carter; and SEMUT 3 headed by Captain W. L. P. ("Bill") Sochon. The areas of operation were: SEMUT 1 – the Trusan valley and its hinterland; SEMUT 2 – the Baram valley and its hinterland; SEMUT 3 – the entire Rejang valley.

Harrison and members of SEMUT 1 parachuted into Bario in the Kelabit Highlands during the later part of March 1945. Initially Harrison established his base at Bario; then, in late May, shifted to Belawit in the Bawang valley (inside the former Dutch Borneo) upon the completion of an airstrip for light aircraft built entirely with native labour. In mid-April, Carter and his team (SEMUT 2) parachuted into Bario, by then securely an SRD base with full support of the Kelabit people. Shortly after their arrival, members of SEMUT 2 moved to the Baram valley and established themselves at Long Akah, the heartland of the Kenyahs. Carter also received assistance from the Kayans. Moving out from Carter's party in late May, Sochon led SEMUT 3 to Belaga in the Upper Rejang where he set up his base of operation.



SEMUT 2 party at Long Akah, May 1945. From left: Cpl Abu Kassan, Sgt Jeh Soen Ken, Capt Bill Sochon, Sgt T. Barrie, Major Toby Carter, Sgt C.W. Pare, Sgt K.D. Hallam, an unnamed POW rescued by the team, and WO D.L. Horsnell.

Kayans and Ibans supported and participated in SEMUT 3 operations. The nomadic Punans also extended a helping hand to Sochon and his comrades.

Prior to 10 June, D-Day of OBOE 6, SRD operatives in North Borneo (AGAS) and northern Sarawak (SEMUT) were relaying intelligence to Blamey's Advanced Land Headquarters at Morotai in the Halmaheras. Furthermore, SRD parties – particularly SEMUT – in their respective areas of operations were organizing, training, and arming native guerrilla bands.

Four days before the launch of OBOE 6, SEMUT 2 captured the Japanese wireless station at Long Lama in the Baram; on the eve of D-Day, SEMUT 1 attacked small Japanese garrisons in the vicinity of the Brunei Bay area.

STALLION and OBOE 6

In addition to the gathering of intelligence from AGAS and SEMUT field parties, preparations were underway for mounting reconnaissance missions aimed at extracting specific information on the topography and enemy dispositions in the immediate hinterland areas of Brunei Bay. An outline plan codenamed STALLION was drawn up on 29 April and involved several phases employing a variety of methods to achieve their objective. The various phases and their respective tasks are summarized as follows:

Phase I

Collection of required information from parties already in the field, that is, by AGAS and SEMUT.

Phase II

Extraction of natives from the Brunei Bay-Kimanis Bay area for interrogation.

Phase III

Creating deception by focussing enemy attention on the Kota Belud-Langkon area through the extraction of natives from the Usukan Bay area.

Phase IV

Close reconnaissance of the Kimanis Bay area from Tanjong Nosong to Tanjong Papar.

Phases V-VIII

Provision of Special Force (SF) Detachment and Special Task (ST) Detachment as follows: 1 SF Detachment and 1 ST Detachment with 9th Australian Division; 1 SF Sub-Detachment with 20th Brigade; and 1 SF Sub-Detachment with 24th Brigade. These detachments were to receive intelligence supplied from the field by wireless transmission (WT). A WT network between field parties (AGAS, SEMUT, STALLION), 9th Division Headquarters, 20th Brigade, 24th Brigade, and Advanced Land Headquarters at Morotai (also the base for Advanced SRD Headquarters).

The flow of intelligence from AGAS and SEMUT parties reached Morotai via WT providing up-to-date information of enemy dispositions, identification of the

Japanese Sago Butai Infantry Battalion that garrisoned Kuching, enemy defences, and troop movements. The field parties also relayed information about Japanese evacuation/escape routes from the east to the west coasts, including staging points as well as the progress of such movements. The location and movement of prisoners-of-war (POWs) in Sarawak, particularly of the Kuching and Sandakan areas, were obtained. The identification of airstrips and aircraft (hidden or camouflaged), previously unreported, and ammunition and/or food dumps were notified to Morotai. This intelligence effort fulfilled to a large extent the objectives of Phase I.

Meanwhile Phase II was implemented from 30 April to 19 May to extract natives likely to have reliable knowledge of navigation in the waters of Brunei Bay as well as information about landing beaches in the bay itself. Phase II was subdivided into Parts 'A', 'B' and 'C'.

Phase IIA was undertaken on 1 May. Using Catalina aircraft, runs were made over Brunei Bay and Labuan Island. Following two failed attempts, two *prahu* (native craft) were intercepted north of Kampong Kuala Lawas. After interviewing eight Brunei Malays, two brothers – Latif bin Jalil and Gapar bin Jalil – were extracted. Aerial reconnaissance was made of Tanjong Nosong and Pulau Tiga for topographical data. In neither location, no enemy activities were detected nor were radar units identified. The Catalina also did not face any anti-aircraft fire. Over Kimanis Bay, the party noted the absence of rolling stock on the railway. Although the two airstrips at Keningau appeared to be serviceable, there were no aircraft. The Keningau-Tambunan road seemed to be in good condition and quite likely to be metalled, but no traffic was observed.

Through questioning of Latif bin Jalil (aged 25 years) and his brother, Gapar bin Jalil (aged 27 years), SRD Headquarters acquired invaluable intelligence of the Brunei Bay area. Some tactical information of Japanese forces (disposition and strength, communications and transport), geographical data (of offshore conditions of Kuala Mengalong, Kuala Lawas, rivers and coastline), the socio-economic and political situation in and around the Brunei Bay area were provided by the brothers. Nonetheless, neither individual was able to provide "advice regarding the most suitable spots for sorties to land". However, they highly recommended three sea captains (*serang*) from Kampong Mengalong named Serang Daman, Serang Usop and Serang Saleh, the last being a second cousin of the brothers. Acting on the suggestion of extracting the above-mentioned natives from Kampong Mengalong, namely Serang Usop and Serang Saleh, Phase IIB was launched on 19 May. Also on the agenda was the extraction of natives from the Kimanis Bay area, as well as intercepting sea-going *prahu* en route from Brunei to Labuan Island.

Altogether, four natives were extracted: one from the Kimanis Bay area and three others from Kampong Mengalong, including the village headman who was a known Japanese sympathizer. Only one of the named individuals was extracted, the others being unavailable. The party succeeded in persuading two fellow villagers of Kampong Mengalong. After a failed attempt to reach Kimanis village itself, a resident of the Kimanis Bay area was chosen and brought back to Morotai. The mission failed to intercept any *prahu* between Brunei and Labuan. On the return journey, the Catalina managed to photograph the town of Tawau on the southeast coast of North Borneo.

Four days earlier, on 15 May, Phase IIC commenced with a dusk landing in Brunei Bay of a party of five, including two Malays Latif bin Ahmad and Gapar bin Jalil. The party made for a point some two miles north of Kampong Mengalong. Their European colleagues returned to the Catalina that left for Morotai. Latif and Gapar obtained a *prahu* and headed for Labuan Island with the objective of obtaining intelligence, as well as to arrange to extract a native of the island for interrogation. At a pre-arranged location (a point north of Kampong Mengalong) at dawn on 19 May, Latif and Gapar together with a Labuan native were picked up by Catalina. An aerial reconnaissance revealed that there were good roads from Mempakul to Menumbok, neither telephone lines nor rolling stock or activity were evident in the Mempakul area, and the area between Mempakul and Tanjong Sakat was firm and level ground.

Phase III was designed as a diversionary tactic in an attempt to deceive the enemy into focussing his attention to the area between Kota Belud and Langkong. The mission aimed at the extraction of natives from the Usukan Bay to Kranga Point area. Five natives and a child were extracted from the village of Kuala Tambal at the mouth of the Tuaran River on 27 May and interrogated two days later. Later, another six more were extracted and their interrogation took place on 30 May. Another thirteen followed, mainly from the area north of Jesselton, and were interrogated on 1 June. The extraction of natives and landings by Catalinas in the area had created "quite an appreciable amount of attention" to the targeted vicinity.

As part of efforts to deceive the enemy, AGAS parties in the field spread rumours of an impending invasion and that natives should evacuate the coastal area. AGAS operatives also carried out sabotage of communication lines and other appropriate diversionary activity north of Jesselton. These tactics commenced five days prior to D-Day (10 June). In support of AGAS activities, leaflets from the Far Eastern Liaison Office (FELO) were rained on the Jesselton-Kota Belud-Langkong sector, adding credence to the rumours. Bombings of key targets in the area further enhanced SRD and FELO actions.

Phase IV focussed on the reconnaissance of the Kimanis Bay area. Specifically, this mission aimed at gathering tactical data of enemy dispositions in the Tanjong Nosong-Tanjong Papar area. Information about the volume of traffic and the importance of the Beaufort-Papar Railway sector was also required. The field party was entrusted with evaluating the effects of aerial bombardment on the railways. Train derailment and destruction of the Papar Bridge were on the agenda, as well as the severing of telephone lines (to be executed on the eve of D-Day). All enemy movements from Brunei northwards and from Jesselton southwards were to be relayed to Morotai. Following the successful implementation of AGAS 1 and 2, Major Chester was available to undertake this assignment, as he had intimate knowledge of the area of operation and had agents and known safe contacts. In addition to the above-mentioned objectives, the party was instructed to obtain intelligence of enemy movements along the Jesselton-Beaufort Railway, the Ranau-Tambunan-Keningau Road, and the hinterland of Kimanis Bay.

Furthermore, during the post-OBOE 6 period, Chester and his unit were to organize a native-protected intelligence network covering the area between Ranau-Keningau Road and Jesselton-Beaufort Railway, and to harass enemy activities on these lines of communications.

During this post-invasion phase also, they would be responsible for providing early warning of any major enemy movement south from Ranau or Jesselton, as well as to create a buffer zone for the protection of the Brunei perimeter. The revised plan that incorporated the long-term objectives of Phase IV was approved by 1st Australian Corps and implemented under the codename AGAS 3.

AGAS 3 (STALLION Phase IV) was launched on 29 May. Accompanying Major Chester were Sergeant S. H. Wong Sue (Jack Sue), Corporal Heywood, and Mandor Ali (an ethnic Malay). They were transported by Catalina and inserted in the late afternoon at a point south of the Bongawan River. Two days later, the party made contact with one Ah Lee, a Chinese friend of Chester. Ah Lee was a long-serving worker with the North Borneo Railway. At the time, he was appointed by the Japanese as stationmaster of Bongawan Railway Station. Ah Lee promised to arrange a meeting between Chester and a Chinese man named Chin Sang. Chin Sang was "Captain China" (Kapitan China), an influential Chinese leader of the area.



AGAS 1 party at Lokopas (in sarongs made from parachute silk). From left: Ma'aruff bin Said, Sgt Jack Wong Sue, Maj Gort Chester, Skeet Hywood, Mahammed Sariff.

After much difficulty, Chester eventually had a meeting with Chin Sang on 2 June. On the issue of cooperation – as guerillas or long-term intelligence agents – both Chin Sang and Ah Lee refused outright. They were, however, willing to provide, on the spot, information of Japanese troop movements, concentrations, and other related matters. Another Chinese man "of suitable guerilla age" who was contacted also displayed little enthusiasm for cooperation.

Meanwhile the party took cognizance of activities in and around the railway track, such as train schedule, cargo to and from Beaufort (stores and troops respectively), and the collection of timber by railway contractors. Owing to the presence of many Japanese in the area, an attempt to make contact with Ng Wai Wong, former Chief Clerk of Kimanis Estate, was in vain. Similarly, the effort of Mandor Ali to enter the Papar area failed for the same reason. The party's base had to be moved four times for safety. Finally on 5 June, radio contact was made with base; this had not been possible earlier, due to the proximity of the enemy "within generator hearing distance". The party returned to base on 7 June.

The plan for OBOE 6 envisaged the seizure, at the earliest practicable time, of Mempakul and Weston, to facilitate the usage of Kimanis Harbour and Beaufort respectively. This strategy was essential as a guard "against enemy movement SOUTH from JESSELTON area to BRUNEI BAY with a view of opposing [the Australian] occupation". For this purpose, a divisional reserve was constituted to carry out the seizure of Mempakul or Weston "taking advantage of surprise, before the enemy can organise sufficient resistance at these places ... [and if successful] a considerable advantage will be gained". Therefore, it was imperative that intelligence of enemy strengths at both places be obtained.

In this connection, two more phases of STALLION were launched. Phases V and VI, with codename GELDING and MARE respectively, were to fulfill the special request made by 9th Division for specific information in the Mempakul-Menumbok and Weston-Sipitang areas, namely the north side and the central part of Brunei Bay respectively.

Lieutenant F. J. Leckie was party leader of GELDING. On 8 June the party landed by Catalina on an uninhabited island at the mouth of the Lakatan River. They intercepted a woman and child along the Padas Damit River. Through her assistance, her husband was contacted, who in turn brought men from the village of Melatup six miles upstream. The headman of Melatup and a fellow villager agreed to escort Dalip bin Achmed, a member of the party, to Weston. As the situation developed, Dalip did not need to enter Weston; instead, two natives were brought out on 10 June. Both were brothers and appeared to be "very reliable" and "quite eager to help". They satisfactorily answered all questions fielded to them about the Japanese, the local inhabitants and situation, landing beaches, and other relevant information. The party returned to base on 11 June.

MARE was launched simultaneously with GELDING at the same insertion point. Two natives were extracted from Mempakul for interrogation. Another two, each from Mempakul and Menumbok, confirmed the information procured from the initial two informants. Having accomplished all objectives, the party returned on 12 June.

STALLION Phase VII covered the activities carried out by SF Detachment and ST Detachment for the 9th Division, Sub-Detachment 'X' for the 20th Brigade, and Sub-Detachment 'Y' for the 24th Brigade. The detachment and sub-detachments accompanied the 9th Division during the OBOE 6 landings in Brunei Bay. Following the landings, Detachment Headquarters was established on Labuan Island.

STALLION Phase VIII was divided into three parts codenamed FILLY, COLT and FOAL. All three missions were undertaken post-invasion by ST Detachment. Briefly, FILLY (13-14 June) was aimed at ascertaining the extent of enemy control and troop disposition in the Brunei Bay area and on Pulau Daat (Daat Island), situated midway between Labuan and Mempakul. COLT (16-18 June) involved the extraction of Kamu Mutu, a Japanese administrator at Sipitang. The objective of FOAL (23-25 June) was to contact an Indian, Kalia (Caleo) Khan of Membakut Estate, and to capture Japanese in the Membakut district for interrogation.

Evaluating SRD contributions to OBOE 6

The pre-invasion SRD long-term projects in North Borneo and Sarawak – AGAS and SEMUT – achieved considerable results within a short period. Consequently Operation OBOE 6 benefited from these achievements, particularly the intelligence gathered by field parties. In addition, the excellent rapport between field parties and native chieftains enabled the re-establishment of some semblance of pre-war administration. The direct contribution of AGAS and SEMUT to OBOE 6 was provision to the 1st Australian Corps and 9th Australian Division of fairly reliable and continuous intelligence concerning enemy movements, concentration, and disposition.

In just three months, AGAS parties had accomplished several remarkable results. AGAS 1 provided intelligence of the Sandakan area that led to fruitful bombing raids. The party discovered that Allied POWs initially known to be at Sandakan were being moved in several groups inland to Ranau. Information on the Japanese escape route from the east to the west coast led to continuous aerial attacks.

A guerilla-training camp and a hospital were established on Jambongan Island. The training camp produced a native guerrilla force of 250 individually selected men with small groups active in the Lingkabau-Trusan-Beluran sector. More than 2,000 native inhabitants benefited from the hospital. Practically all towns and villages throughout the northeastern area of North Borneo had active native agents, or at the least, Allied sympathizers. An invaluable radio link was created between AGAS 1 headquarters at Sungei Sungei and other centres in former Dutch Borneo and Morotai. The field party succeeded in establishing several safe Catalina landing points and DZs in the operational area.

The accomplishments of AGAS 2 were equally promising. Native agents were placed throughout the entire northeastern peninsula area, Langkong, Kudat and Bandau. AGAS 2 also succeeded in contacting Chinese guerillas in Kota Belud. Furthermore, a native guerilla force between 150 and 250-strong was raised in the operational sector. A hospital was established in the Lokopas area to cater for local needs. Intelligence from AGAS 2 reported that Pulau Banggi, on the northern tip of North Borneo facing Marudu Bay, was free from enemy occupation.

AGAS 3 (STALLION Phase IV), though unable to accomplish many of its objectives owing to the strong enemy concentration in the operational area of Jesselton-Keningau-Beaufort, conveyed intelligence which proved beneficial to

OBOE 6 planners. Under the prevailing circumstances of Japanese strength (estimated to be nearly 6,000 troops between Jesselton and Beaufort), post-invasion plans for this sector were devised to meet this enemy concentration. Apart from the strong enemy presence, Chester and his men observed that the Chinese in the area refused all cooperation for fear of Japanese reprisals, as many Chinese guerillas had been killed during a failed revolt in October 1943. Intelligence gained from this mission prevented a head-on clash with the enemy.

AGAS managed to supply reliable intelligence of enemy troop strengths and dispositions. The figure of 31,000 reported in May 1945 appeared to be not far off the total number of 35,000 officially recorded in October. Also, reports that the Japanese forces were evacuating the coast and moving inland were later proven to be true. Nonetheless, there were criticisms of the performance of AGAS operations as a whole.

Alan Powell concluded that "Agas succeeded politically, had little direct military value and failed as a POW rescue operation". The presence of AGAS operatives behind enemy lines was a great morale booster for the return of the white men.

Furthermore, the recruitment, training and arming of local guerilla units were tangible indications of the turning tide of the war and not mere propaganda dribble. But members of local guerilla units could have made greater impact in harassing a retreating enemy, except for their apathy, fear, and desire to return home. The reluctance showed by local recruits was understandable given Japanese reprisals following the failed 1943 rebellion. Despite the apparent anti-Japanese feelings among the coastal Malays and Bajaus, the Dusuns and Kadazans of the inland regions, and the urban Chinese, there was real and general fear about taking action against the enemy. It was not surprising, then, that some local guerrilla recruits deserted their units to return to their home villages, perhaps strongly motivated by their intention to defend their family against Japanese repression.

Notwithstanding the incorporation of the objectives of "Operation KINGFISHER" into the list of tasks of AGAS 1, there was never any green light to execute the rescue mission of the POWs in Sandakan and/or Ranau. AGAS 1 did fulfill the task of feeding SRD headquarters with information about the POWs, including their subsequent movement inland to Ranau in a series of infamous "Death Marches".

Impressive successes by SEMUT

Remarkable success had also been achieved by SEMUT, particularly 1 and 2. As of June 1945, SEMUT 1 had armed units operating in the Lawas, Trusan and Limbang Rivers and the surrounding vicinity approximating the entire portion of northeastern Sarawak. Furthermore SEMUT 1 had penetrated into North Borneo with an outpost in the Pensiangan area and a party in control of the Padas River as far north as Tenom. Also, an operational base was established at Berang on the Mentarang River in Dutch Borneo while secondary bases were on the Sembakong and Karayan rivers. Loembis and Malinau were secured and patrols reached the Kayan River area. An extensive native intelligence network throughout the operational area had supplied invaluable intelligence on enemy dispositions and movements in Tutong, Brunei, the Brunei Bay area, the sector from Brunei to Weston, and the Pensiangan-Keningau area. SEMUT 1 had knowledge of Japanese escape routes from the Tarakan and Malinau areas on the eastern coast towards North Borneo, and from Brunei Bay up the Limbang and Trusan Rivers. The party also relayed information about POWs and civilian internees in the operational area. Medical service and supplies have been given to the natives. The completion of an airstrip at Belawit facilitated the landings by Auster aircraft.

Practically all the native settlements in the Trusan valley and its hinterland were under the control of SEMUT 1. Some semblance of pre-war administration had been re-established. Moreover, inhabitants in this operational area had been organized and trained for defense and for possible expansion of control in the near future when the situation permitted. About 600 native militiamen were trained; a large number of them supplied with arms and ammunition, and employed in offensives against the enemy.

SEMUT 1 parties in the field had been encouraging the native population to deny food and labour to the enemy. Several Japanese patrols sent to investigate and re-establish the supply line to the interior were ambushed and decimated. Employment of this tactic resulted in the stoppage of enemy movement northwards via Malinau and hindered the completion of road construction from Weston to Brunei via Lawas, thereby effectively preventing the southern movement of troops into the Brunei area.

From its headquarters at Long Akah, SEMUT 2 fielded parties on the Baram and Tutoh Rivers, established a sub-headquarters at Long Lama on the Baram River and a detachment in the Tutoh basin. A strong patrol made its presence in the vicinity of Marudi. Another sub-headquarters was located at Long Lebang on

the Tinjar River; and attempts were made to effect control of the entire Tinjar valley and towards the coast south of Miri. Native agents under the auspices of SEMUT 2 moved in and out of enemy-occupied territory from Brunei southwards to Bintulu. By June the operational area of SEMUT 2 had extended westwards, from the Baram River to a line from Bintulu to the Upper Rejang.

A native intelligence network established by SEMUT 2 provided information of Japanese dispositions and troop movements in the Labuan, Miri, Lutong, Kuala Belait, and Upper Rejang areas. Moreover, enemy outposts and hideouts along the Baram and Tutoh Rivers were known, as well as Japanese cross-country escape/evacuation routes southwards from Bintulu to Long Nawan. Like the operational area in SEMUT 1, briefings and direction given to native chieftains by SEMUT 2 created an approximation of the pre-war administration in the Baram valley and neighbouring surroundings. Small units of the 350-strong native guerilla force, organized, armed and led by SEMUT 2, had engaged in skirmishes with the enemy.

By June, SEMUT 3 had reached Belaga in the Upper Rejang and was working westwards towards Kapit, with the intention of identifying suitable points for Catalina landings. The party was in the process of making contacts with the native population in order to establish an intelligence network.

SEMUT's military successes were proudly highlighted by one of its major players, Tom Harrisson. In his account published in 1959, he quoted claims in a booklet produced by "Z" Special (SRD) for the ceremonial unveiling of a war memorial on Garden Island, Western Australia, that: "The Unit had inflicted some 1700 casualties on the Japs at the cost of some 112 white lives". This same source credited Semut 1 with "over 1,000 Japanese killed", out of the "Z" total of 1700, and noted that of the 112 white deaths, *none* were lost in Semut I (or II, or III) operations.

On intelligence gathering by SEMUT, Harrisson's biographer offers the following insight to his effective strategy: Another result of Tom's policy of scattering his operatives thinly over a wide terrain was that it gave Tom, to whom the SEMUT 1 men reported by radio and runner, an extraordinarily complete up-to-date picture of the military and economic situation and the climate of local opinion throughout northern Borneo, from Brunei Bay to Tarakan Island. Drawing on this data, Tom sent frequent wireless messages to "Z" Special headquarters, giving detailed intelligence on enemy troops all along the coast of northern Borneo and recommending specific targets for pinpoint bombing.

The sheer size of the area covered by SEMUT – northern and central Sarawak, southwestern British North Borneo, and northeastern Dutch Borneo – was an impressive accomplishment in itself. Harrison attributed the success of this vast coverage to *"the remarkable response of the native peoples of Sarawak and all within Borneo"*. A fitting tribute to SEMUT is that by Powell, who commented:

Semut did give help to the AIF in providing Intelligence and diverting attention from their Borneo landings, but far and away their clearest value lie in the great boost they gave local moral, self-confidence and the re-establishment of peaceful administration after war's end.

STALLION and specific intelligence

Equally, if not more, useful was the specific intelligence supplied by the STALLION Project.

Commented the report on SRD activities supporting OBOE 6, *"A great deal of valuable intelligence was made available to the invading forces through operatives of SRD working often under difficult and very dangerous conditions in operation, STALLION"*. Practically almost all the objectives – the request for detailed intelligence – were supplied by the various phases of the STALLION operation.

Requests for intelligence from AGAS and SEMUT under STALLION Phase I had been adequately fulfilled. Phase II (A, B, C) supplied the information regarding the navigation of Brunei Bay waters and landing beaches in the bay area itself. Intimate knowledge of conditions, particularly of infrastructure on Labuan Island, was provided by Phase IIB. In order to offset enemy suspicion, diversionary tactics were carried out in Usukan Bay area under Phase III. Detailed intelligence relating to enemy strength, dispositions, activity and movement, defences, gun positions, obstacles, and bivouac areas in the Mempakul-Menumbok and Weston-Sipitang-Beaufort sectors was obtained from Phase VI (MARE), as well as Phases IIB and V (GELDING) respectively. Likewise Phase IV (AGAS 3) informed OBOE 6 planners of enemy strength and activities in and around Jesselton, the track in the Ranau-Tambunan-Keningau-Tenom area, and provided intelligence on the Jesselton-Beaufort railway.

Reliability of information

Reflecting upon the foregoing review of SRD operations relating to OBOE 6, attention is drawn to the issue of the reliability of information from native sources. Owing to the conspicuous nature of European presence in enemy-held territory, it was imperative that a great deal of reliance for the task of gathering intelligence was on local, indigenous or Chinese, agents and/or contacts. Apparently, the reliability of intelligence from local sources was suspect, if not erroneous. Incidences were reported where the progress of the AIF advance was hindered by "battalions being filled with false bogeys due to exaggerated and incorrect estimates" of enemy strength and dispositions.

It can not be denied that the intelligence gathered by SRD field parties – AGAS and SEMUT, as well as STALLION – were procured from mostly native and, to a lesser extent, Chinese, sources. Under the circumstances, field parties were instructed to lean "towards the capture of Japanese bodies ... and also to recce [reconnaissance] by the parties themselves". However, SRD defended itself and explained that the "blame" for inaccurate intelligence came from other sources: It was pointed out to him [Major General Wootten] that a great deal of misleading infm [information] had come from Chinese and natives rounded up in the advance, and that the staff had not sifted out the good from the bad in assessing and compiling the infm. The interrogators have been passing on the infm as given, without sufficient emphasis on the reliability of the subject. Some of these estimates have been truly absurd.

On the other hand, information from local sources was often valuable, as demonstrated by the MARE and GELDING operations where the intelligence supplied proved to be correct. Nonetheless, the following case of intelligence from STALLION Phase IV (AGAS 3) illustrates Wootten's dissatisfaction.

It has been found from captured [Japanese] documents that an Independent Mixed Bde did, in fact, reinforce the Beaufort area, and their full strength would have been approx 5,500, BUT, according to the same documents, 60% of these failed to arrive through sickness, death or straggling, and of these 60% another 40% were not in a position to fight due to sickness or loss of weapons. Therefore, the estimate, good as it was, is much too over-estimated to satisfy Divisional requirements.

Another complication in the supply of accurate and reliable information was the prevalence of rumours. Local informants may not always have been privy to the required information and consequently passed on rumours to SRD operatives,

not because they deliberately intended to mislead but owing to their inability to differentiate between fact and opinion, truth and mere "talk". The solution appeared to be to require more than one source of intelligence for corroboration and/or confirmation of claims.

Also, in this connection, as well as taking cue from the experiences of field parties, the following rule of practice needed to be followed:

... owing to the intensive Jap[anese] counter-espionage activities through the medium of native informers, it is not practicable to insert a European party into any particular locality from which intelligence is of military importance without at least one of the party ha[v]ing local knowledge or native contacts. On the other hand, it is also impracticable to secure effective intelligence results working through native agents alone, without white supervision. ... [in order] to create an effective intelligence organisation in a Malay-speaking area, it is necessary to use white organisers who should be able to speak Malay, have a knowledge of the country in which they are to work, and as far as possible be acquainted with individual natives with whom initial contacts could be made.

The party must, as soon as possible after insertion, instal[l] itself in a safe HQ [headquarters] with WT [wireless transmission] communication and from that HQ extend its activities in the form of a wide network into the area from which intelligence is required.

Furthermore, travel restrictions imposed by the Japanese notwithstanding, apparently the dissemination of information within the native community continued unaffected. Capitalizing from this advantage, field parties could procure intelligence particularly from natives of the higher class (chieftains, headmen) "at a considerable distance from the actual target area".

In summarizing SRD operations in conjunction with requirements of OBOE 6, Major K. F. Mollard, the officer commanding SF Detachment, noted that:

So far Div [9th Division] have been most satisfied with results. "MARE" and "GELDING" information was most welcome, the "AGAS III" report not so welcome but nice to know and "SEMUT I and II" are in a position to give us a great deal of information in the near future.⁶¹

KINGFISHER: SRD bungle or American reluctance?

Between 1942 and 1943 some 2750 Allied prisoners of war, mainly Australians and British, were shipped from Singapore to Sandakan. They were utilized by the Japanese as slave labour in the construction of a military airfield. Captain Susumi Hoshijima, the Sandakan camp commandant, was a harsh taskmaster. The combination of overwork, poor nutrition and even starvation, coupled with harsh treatment, daily beatings, torture, and an assortment of tropical diseases (beri-beri, malaria, dysentery, tuberculosis), led to the death of many of the POWs. Following the discovery of a clandestine camp radio in mid-1943, the responsible parties were duly executed. As a security measure, the Japanese dispatched most of the Australian and British officers to the main POW and internment camp at Batu Lintang, Kuching. Only eight officers remained behind at Sandakan with the mostly enlisted men.

Between December 1943 and May 1945, the death toll at Sandakan was 1100. In order to avoid the recurring Allied bombings of coastal areas from the early part of 1945, the Japanese moved the remainder POWs in three forced marches inland, the first in January, the second in May followed by another in June. Out of the more than 1000 who made the "Death March", only 450 reached the interior destination of Ranau. Death from exhaustion, starvation, and disease claimed the lives of the bulk of the marchers; those who were too weak to continue were shot, others bayoneted to death. Two Australians managed to escape during the second march.



Pictured in October 1945, the burnt-out remains of a compound at Sandakan where the bodies of 300 murdered prisoners of war were discovered.

Another four Australians miraculously succeeded in escaping from the Ranau camp. None survived Ranau; likewise there were no survivors from the 300 remaining at Sandakan after the second march inland.

According to an AGAS preliminary operational report covering the period 24 February to 31 May 1945, three objectives were outlined:

1. To establish a base on the east coast of B.N.B. [British North Borneo] with W/T [wireless transmission] communication to AUSTRALIA.
2. To set up a native intelligence network in B.N.B., *particular importance being attached to detailed information on the PW [prisoners of war] camp at SANDAKAN (originally project KINGFISHER)* [emphasis added] and the high priority target indicated by GHQ [General Headquarters], KUDAT.
3. Through the medium of known agents, to establish friendly relations with the natives and ultimately to organise such armed resistance as might be authorised by GHQ.

It seems then that a prime focus of AGAS operatives was to gather intelligence relating to the Sandakan POWs. Apparently, this objective proved to be quite successful because "an extensive system of contacts has been extended, and agents have been placed in and around SANDAKAN, BELURAN, LINKABAU, KUDAT and LANGKON". Acting upon the information received from AGAS, the results were as follows:

1. The destruction by air of approx. 600 Japs in SANDAKAN, plus 9 motor launches. ...
2. Much reliable information has been passed on as to Japanese movements from SANDAKAN to RANAU, the extent of troop movements and concentrations in KHOTA [KOTA] BELUD, LANGKON and KUDAT, and the move of the PW Camp, previously in SANDAKAN, in groups to RANAU. ...

It is amply clear that AGAS operatives in the field possessed detailed as well as accurate information as to the situation of the POWs of Sandakan, including their movements "in groups to RANAU", namely the "Death March". Furthermore, Major Chester, the leader of AGAS, claimed *inter alia* that "There has been no break or trouble in communication from the date of the first contact [February 1945] up to the present moment [May 1945]".

If the AGAS report is to be believed, and there is no apparent reason to doubt its veracity, why then was no attempt been made to effect the planned rescue of the Sandakan POWs – that is, implement Operation KINGFISHER.

KINGFISHER, conceived sometime in mid-1944, proposed a rescue plan of POWs in Sandakan by a paratroop unit. The probable reason for aborting KINGFISHER has been hotly debated, with arguments ranging from a conspiratorial cover-up that implicated Australia's military elite to MacArthur's non-cooperation in providing vital support for the operation.

Blamey's speech at the Second Annual Conference of the Australian Armoured Corps Association in Melbourne on 19 November 1947 apparently "let the cat out of the bag". Lieutenant Colonel (later Sir) John Overall's 800-strong paratroop battalion which had been training at the Atherton Tableland for a covert operation that never came through knew nothing of the details of their mission until Blamey's address.

We had complete plans for them [paratroopers]. Our spies [AGAS and its local agents] were in Japanese-held territory. We had established the necessary contacts with prisoners at Sandakan, and our parachute troops were going to relieve them. ... But at the moment we wanted to act, *we couldn't get the necessary aircraft to take them in*. The operation would certainly have saved that death march of Sandakan.

Lynette Ramsay Silver argued that Blamey blamed MacArthur as an excuse to cover-up an SRD bungle in the gathering of accurate intelligence. The Blamey-MacArthur relationship had never been cosy, each accusing the other of attempting to undermine his authority. Blamey, she claimed, told Air Vice-Marshal George Jones, the Chief of the Air Staff, that "while he [Blamey] had not submitted his rescue plan to the Australian government or other authorities, he had raised it with MacArthur, 'who did not favour it'".

Silver denounced Blamey's claim about "getting the necessary aircraft" as utter nonsense which was not supported by evidence. First, she said, it was absurd to blame MacArthur and the American reluctance to supply the necessary air transport. No such request was made to MacArthur, who evidently then had at his disposal 600 C-47s. If the Americans were reluctant as was claimed, the RAAF had in its own pool of 71 C-47s.

According to KINGFISHER, only 34 aircraft were required. Secondly, and more conclusively, there was no need of American planes or that of the RAAF, as SRD itself had its own exclusive Air Section, codenamed 200 Flight, which had been established in February 1945. As of March, there were in operation six

Liberators (B-24s) utilized in dropping personnel and "storpedoes" in Borneo and Timor.

According to Silver, Blamey used MacArthur as the scapegoat for SRD's failings. SRD apparently seriously blundered in Timor. Not realizing that its operatives were being compromised, SRD continued over a two-year period to provide "regular supplies of stores, ammunition, weapons, gold and money" to the Japanese. Unknowingly, 32 operatives dropped into Timor were lost to the enemy as a consequence of the breach of security. This bungle was kept under wraps. Silver considered that a similar bungle occurred in Borneo.



An Australian inspection party ashore on Berhala Island, in Sandakan Harbour, 23 October 1945. At centre is Captain R. K. McLaren of SRD and "Z" Special Force, who had been speaking with a local Chinese (left) about a dummy Japanese anti-aircraft gun.

Mid-1945 had been a nightmare period for those controlling SRD. At about the same time they had learned there was a problem in Timor, the Borneo mission had been in ruins. Faced with a calamity of huge proportions, the repercussions for which would be immense, they had begun to lay the groundwork for a massive cover-up.

Nonetheless two individuals believed Blamey's explanation of KINGFISHER being stood down due to MacArthur's failure to provide the necessary air transport, namely Overall, the commanding officer of the paratroop battalion, and Athol Moffitt, the Allied prosecutor at the Labuan war crimes trials, whose book about Project KINGFISHER was published in 1989. Overall was convinced that the rescue plan was aborted because MacArthur had refused to supply the planes for his paratroopers. In later years, during an interview with Moffitt, Overall in retrospect re-confirmed his stance:

Yes, there had been a plan to rescue the Sandakan prisoners. We were asked by Army HQ [Aust.] to undertake the rescue in the belief there were only third class Japanese troops there. ... General Morshead pressed the plan, and I understood General Blamey wanted it, but the US would not release the planes to make the drop. Certainly our HQ wanted it.

But at the back of his mind was another belief, which he confessed ten years later: "I am told, and I believe it to be so, that there was a series of cover-ups".

For his part, Moffitt did not suspect the possibility of a cover-up, and wholly accepted Blamey's explanation of putting the blame on the Americans, namely MacArthur:

The *truth* is that the Australian Paratroop Battalion was, as Blamey said, trained for the rescue operation. The *truth* is that the plan could not proceed because Australia did not have the transport and drop planes for its paratroops and MacArthur's HQ declined to provide them. [emphases added]

However, Major Chester, the leader of AGAS party, was well aware of SRD's shortcomings. He confided with Sergeant Wong Sue, telling him "You know what they're going to do? Blamey's going to shift the blame for all their bungling onto MacArthur". Chester, however, was unable to challenge Blamey in 1947; he died of blackwater fever at Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu) in August 1946. Nor was there much the Chinese Wong Sue could do at the time to dispute Blamey's claim.

Denis Emerson-Elliott, a member of SOE-Far East who was privy to various SRD operations (JAYWICK, RIMAU, PYTHON and KINGFISHER), confessed five decades after the end of the war:

It was a mess from beginning to end. The intelligence was a disaster. The bungling on the planning side was dreadful, so Blamey decided to blame

MacArthur. A dreadful show all round. But by the time the truth was realised it was too late to do anything – except blame MacArthur.

But two writers – Alan Powell and Don Wall – maintain that KINGFISHER was of low priority and therefore subsequently aborted. Powell stated that despite the continuous flow of intelligence from AGAS operatives to SRD headquarters "yet neither Agas 1 nor Agas 3 parties made any attempt to carry out the detailed investigation of Sandakan prescribed for KINGFISHER". The non-action, according to Powell, "was the reduction of the KINGFISHER project to third place in the Agas 1 priority list behind the founding of an Intelligence network and a guerilla force in North Borneo".

The "low priority" thesis is supported by the principle expressed by C. H. Finlay, commanding officer of "Z" Special Unit and sometime acting deputy director of SRD: Wars are essentially cruel and brutal and in the execution of the principal object no activity which does not contribute to the achievement of that objective (in this case the earliest possible defeat of Japan in its homeland) can be entertained.

Furthermore, Powell asserts that there were those who feared that if a rescue attempt was not completely successful, the Japanese might annihilate the remainder. "By the last days of the war," he claims, "the Japanese would stop at nothing to conceal the evidence against them ..." This fear was unfounded, however, as despite the Australian landings (OBOE 6) at Brunei Bay on 10 June 1945, no grand slaughter of POWs or civilian internees were evident.

Wall concurs with Powell that KINGFISHER was low on the SRD agenda and that priorities lay elsewhere. He wholly rejected the notion that there was a cover-up in order to disguise the shortcomings of SRD in the gathering of accurate information. Like Powell, Wall also expressed the probable backlash of the Japanese if there was an attempt to rescue of the POWs.

Although Silver argued rather convincingly that there was a cover-up of SRD failings (translated into Blamey's blunder) and putting the blame on the Americans, it is difficult to dismiss the evidence from the AGAS operational report of February-May 1945. From my own research I tend to agree with Powell that the rescue of POWs was low in the priority of the AIF. Preparations were in earnest for the launching of the OBOE operations, and it would have been a diversion of effort to mount a rescue attempt in the midst of the overall invasion plan. Furthermore, as pointed out, there was a genuine fear that an attempted rescue operation might effectively sign the death warrant for all POWs and civilian internees. History, however, did not witness a Japanese

massacre of POWs but during the momentous months prior to the landings, a Japanese vindictive backlash was a real possibility. "The bitter irony of this concern," Powell pointed out, "is that when some might have been saved, all were left to die."

Conclusion

The OBOE 6 operation has been described as well planned and efficiently executed. There was no doubt that the role of the SRD, particularly in supplying intelligence, could not be underestimated. Notwithstanding the problems of obtaining reliable intelligence, SRD field operatives provided the required information that, in no small measure, contributed to the unqualified success of the invasion.

Moreover, the various SRD-led native guerrilla units posed an "irritant" to the enemy, aptly living up to being "sandflies" (AGAS) and "ants" (SEMUT).

Notwithstanding the successful landings at Brunei Bay and Labuan, there was still a long way to go for the AIF following D-Day. It was another month or so before the military phase was concluded. SRD operatives continued with their task of gathering information of the enemy, and creating trained and armed native guerrilla units. The continuous supply of intelligence on enemy dispositions, activities and movements enabled the regular forces to focus on specific offensive actions in eliminating the enemy. SRD-led native guerilla bands complemented the AIF in mopping-up operations, thereby hastening the re-occupation process.

And as for the sad ending of the Sandakan POWs, their rescue took a backseat to "the execution of the principal object", namely, the re-occupation of Borneo and the defeat of Japan.

Thanks to the successes achieved by SRD long-term field parties – AGAS and SEMUT – in establishing a semblance of pre-war administration in relatively vast areas under their *de facto* authority, the task of establishing civil control, once hostilities ended, was made much easier. But of more importance, this SRD sanctioned native administrative structure minimized the high risks of civil disorder or even all-out open clashes between rival groups during the interregnum, from the cessation of hostilities to the establishment of stable government.

In relation to the establishment of stable administration, the British Borneo Civil Affairs Unit (BBCAU) was constituted under the command of 1st Australian Corps. The chief responsibility of BBCAU was to exercise administrative control of re-occupied areas as the regular forces advanced. Discussions between Lieutenant Colonel Chapman-Walker (SRD) and Brigadier C. F. C. Macaskie (BBCAU) produced guidelines for implementation as occasion dictated. These required SRD personnel to act as advance representatives of BBCAU. For its part, BBCAU would furnish SRD with "all policy directives intended for CA [Civil Affairs] officers, and keep SRD informed on all matters of general policy in connection with the administration of territory". SRD-BBCAU cooperation was effected in this manner. BBCAU was also to provide SRD with officers to assist their field parties in territories not yet re-occupied. Subsequently, as areas controlled by SRD were re-occupied, they were to hand over to BBCAU personnel operating in those areas, and release all personnel with pre-war experience of British Borneo then serving with SRD once the re-occupation of British Borneo was complete.

The working arrangement between SRD and BBCAU, although not devoid of friction and hitches, produced overall satisfactory results as the re-occupation progressed.

After having laid the groundwork in the months leading to the OBOE 6 operation, SRD operatives in the field had to shoulder a heavier burden of responsibility during the post-invasion period. SRD personnel in their respective spheres of influence and control faced not only the military task in handling a retreating enemy, but also an even more formidable undertaking in attending to civilian problems of food and medical supplies, and an increasing possibility of inter-ethnic troubles.



QUESTION - an iconic image of SAS Jeeps BUT why did they cut out most of the grills? There are lots of theories but does anyone have the real reason why they did this?

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A badly damaged TBF Avenger attempting to make it back to its carrier, circa February, 1945



Daimler Dingo NZ23953 in Waiouru note the use of Headlights and sidelights from a Stuart tank



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