



VOICES

FROM

BORNEO

THE JAPANESE WAR

MAJOR JIM TRUSCOTT ET AL

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The operations carried out by the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) in the Borneo area during World War II were, with the sole exception of the Jaywick raid on Singapore Harbour, the most successful of all missions undertaken by the organisation². SRD conducted many operations during the War but today little is known of these activities. Many of the valuable and enduring lessons that could come from a complete understanding of the SRD operations in Borneo remain unrecorded. Unless this is redressed, some future generation of Australian special operators will relearn these lessons at a great cost.

Major Jim Truscott, who served on Headquarters Special Operations in 1997, determined that he would shed a little more light on the activities of one of these SRD mission, Operation SEMUT. In typical Truscott style he, and the other members of the team xxx, did not confine their research to comfortable libraries. They went to the locations and experienced the terrain, sought out and interviewed surviving guerilla and their relations and this monograph records those experiences.

Peter Stanley, Senior Historian, Australian War Memorial observed that Jim Truscott has “*produced a superbly evocative and often fascinating and moving contribution to Australian military history and a book which ought to be published and used widely. The most impressive feature of Voices from Borneo is that it is based on on-the-spot oral history. As you know, I am an advocate of historians getting their boots muddy, but you have pulled off one of the most adventurous filed trips that I have known of in the filed. I hope that your achievement will be recognised far beyond the small readership of SAS members and those interested in Borneo's history.*”

It is difficult to recapture accurately the mood of 1945 and avoid making judgements from the perspective of 1997 so much of what was accepted as benchmarks of that era has vanished and without living in that time it is difficult to judge fairly the achievements of the SEMUT parties. However the author has looked at Operation SEMUT from a number of different perspective's and by any measure it is difficult not to be in awe of their achievements.

The involvement and assistance of the Malaysian and Indonesian Special Forces was appreciated. After all, the activities of the SRD were carried out on what is now the sovereign territory of Malaysia and Indonesian and the operations often included their nationals. In this sense it is a shared history and one which has links with the present.

The monograph begs further research in combination with other material on special operations to draw broad conclusions for the future about physical and psychological factors involved in special services operations in South east Asia. I hope someone will use the signposts. established by Major Truscott to pick up the challenge.

Major Jim Truscott and his team are to be commended for revealing further information on the Operation SEMUT.

¹ Colonel Don Higgins sponsored Exercise Semut Retrace, The oral history in December 1996 to Febuary 1997 to find former Semut guerrilas throughout Borneo.

² Extract from the Australian Archive, Borneo Operations - Introduction.

Operation Semut⁴ was but one, of some eighty special operations conducted by the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) in WWII. In turn, SRD was but only one part, albeit the most active section, of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB), which was charged with conducting special operations by General MacArthur⁵. Due to their very secretive nature, it is difficult to write about operations conducted behind enemy lines. Their field records are scant, and the official files were sanitised at the end of the war to protect the operatives involved and the clandestine nature of the organisations. As extant records were not released until the 1980s, there has never been a comprehensive attempt to document Semut's activities, not in the least their impact on the war against Japan. Consequently there was much value in 'sniffing the ground', to retrace former guerrillas from Semut's Borneo Interior Force (BIF), even over fifty years later. As I walked through the mountainous interior of Borneo in late 1996 and early 1997, I was able to meet over sixty former guerrillas and thereby put Semut's achievements into some sort of Southwest Pacific Theatre and Australian national perspective. Most of what I have written is from oral history from indigenous guerrilla and Australian operative alike, although I still have more questions than what I have answers to. None the less, it is fair to conclude that offensive guerrilla warfare was the least of Semut's objectives, its primary task being to win the popular support of the indigenous people. Its fundamental intelligence gathering mission, albeit through the arming and training of selected volunteers, and its post capitulation handover to civil affairs officers, makes its actions directly applicable to the roles performed by the modern day, Australian Special Air Service.

What follows is very much an oral and pictorial history of Operation Semut. While united by a common purpose and largely under Australian control, the personal experiences of operatives and their guerrillas alike were so often different, that it is difficult to use their accounts of their actions to historically support any detailed military campaign or Allied political conclusions. This was the very nature of the dispersed, guerrilla war that they fought. While it is possible to make significant tactical comment, this monograph does not stand as a definitive account of Operation Semut. This is now impossible to write. What has been written contains inconsistencies through lapses of memory by participants and possibly their deliberate omissions⁶. This is the nature of oral military history. This monograph simply gives some of the surviving indigenous people of Borneo, and some of the surviving Australian (and one British) operatives, an opportunity to tell their previously unwritten stories, through the eyes of a serving Special Forces officer. I bear all responsibility for my inability to accurately translate and fully understand the eighty or so interviews I had with operatives and guerrillas, and their descendants. As an accurate record of an oral history, it requires academic scrutiny, and the corroboration from additional sources. This challenge remains for others to achieve. Hopefully this historical monograph cum trekking guide, will inspire others to 'sniff the ground' before all the guerrillas and operatives are dead. The Japanese are also yet to write their version of the events. All of my correspondence with operatives and guerrillas is stored at the Special Air Service Regiment Historical Collection in Perth. Some aspects remain particularly sensitive, and at the request of the operatives and for the benefit of their relatives, this material has been deliberately deleted. In due course, serious historians can view this material with the permission of the SAS Historical Collection.

³ Major Jim Truscott was posted to Headquarters Special Operations in Canberra when he undertook Exercise Semut Retrace in late 1997 and early 1998. He is now serving in the Special Air Service Regiment in Perth.

⁴ The Malay word for ant.

⁵ For a comprehensive study of the AIB and its subordinate sections, see *War By Stealth, Australians and the Allied Intelligence Bureau 1942-1945*, by Alan Powell, Melbourne University Press, 1996. See also *In Retrospect, Special Operations Headquarters, World War Two*, by Command and Staff College, Fort Queenscliff, 19 September 1992.

⁶ Spelling of names varies throughout the text according to the speaker or original writer.

Finally I have not achieved as much as I set out to do. Due to the restrictions on visiting Belaga in 1997⁷, it was not possible to retrace Semut III's original route from Bario over difficult country to the headwaters of the Rajang River. I also had insufficient time to follow Semut II's exploits along the Tutoh River. This was a major disappointment, and remains to be done when circumstances permit. There are numerous guerrillas who are still alive and living along those routes. In the first month I was accompanied by Major Bruce O'Connor from 1st Commando Regiment, and Mr Neil Thomas. In the second month I was accompanied by various people at different times, including Major O'Connor, Mr Thomas and Sergeant Robert 'Lefty' Krikorian from the Special Air Service Regiment. Four members from Kopassus, the Indonesian Army's Special Forces joined us during our travels in East Kalimantan. They were Mayor Yuandrias from their Headquarters, 1st Leutnant Ngadiono (Mr Di) from Group III, 2nd Leutnant Zamroni (Mr Roy) from Group I, 2nd Sergeant Nyoman Poni (Mr Nyom) from Group III and Chief Private Suwarto (Awee) from Group II. The Malaysian Army was not able to participate, but their border patrol bases in Sabah and Sarawak provided generous assistance.



Sergeant Danny Sheppard Semut II, with his Kenyah guerrillas at Long Lama after the attack on the Wireless Station in June 1945. They are equipped with Lee Enfields and .30 calibre American carbines. The 'Sergeant' inspecting the troops is the eldest son of the Paramount Chief of the Baram River, Penghulu Tama Wen Agin. The other fully trained soldier on the left is an Indonesian who escaped from the Japanese.

⁷A special visit was required to visit Belaga due to the construction of the Bakun Dam.



Sergeant Fred Sanderson, DCM, Semut I. Sanderson was a hospital medical orderly with the AIF in the Middle East before being selected to join SRD. He was awarded his DCM for numerous 'long house incidents' resulting in the killing of 75 Japanese. His citation belies his actions. He was born in Bangkok.

The Return of the Ants

The War Within The World Within

For years I had wanted to walk through Borneo. Jungle travel is not quite the same as mountaineering, but this is the land where men with tails are still occasionally reported. I also knew that in 1945, the last year of the war, a group of secret, mainly Australian operatives went about organising a guerrilla army in its vast interior. Their plan was to hit the Japs from behind when the Allies landed on the coast. My plan was to retrace their paths and meet with the tribal people from the ulu (interior) who had fought in one of the most successful campaigns in Southeast Asian Theatre. Operation Semut, the Malay word for ant, consisted of over 80 men from Z Special Unit and some 2000 native fighters. Sampson Bala Palaba, a Kelabit from Bario, greeted us in Sarawak in the highlands of Borneo. At the age of 11, Sampson's Father was a cook for Major Harrison, the egocentric leader of one of the Semut parties. Then like Z Special Unit, who had originally jumped into the Plains of Bah around Bario, we promptly engaged in an alcoholic binge before confronting the security officials who control access to the ulu. Permits into the interior are still required, largely as a legacy of Confrontation, but more recently due to Bruno Manser's (a modern day *Robbin Hood*) anti-logging activities with the semi-nomadic Penan. For over ten years loggers have been *Robbing Wood* from the tropical forests and causing much distress to the Orang Ulu. As a consequence all Orang Putih (whitemen) face close scrutiny before being given clearance to mix with the natives. As luck would have it, we had arrived on a Friday the 13th and we spent a frustrating week filling out numerous applications.

Eventually we headed off to the Borneo Triangle, at the junction of Sabah, Kalimantan and Sarawak. No sooner had we set out along the Padas River, when Cyclone 'Greg' brought us face to face with squelching mud and all the rain that the South China Sea could throw at us. God only knows how the original Liberators from the secret RAAF 200 Flight had managed to fly through these conditions. Not long before leaving Australia I had received a letter from a former operative, who had signed off with a friendly note to beware of cold nights, mosquitoes and leeches. I should have paid closer attention, as over the next two months our silk sleeping bags were often too light to stop us shaking from the cold, and despite fifty years of developments in chemical warfare, the Army has still not found a solution to those blood sucking worms. Initially we trudged through Murut kampungs, much changed from their wartime pursuits of cutting off heads and ambushing small parties of Japs with blowpipes. Christmas day was spent feasting on wild boar and forest fruit, in between watching football and listening to constant hymns being sung. Such was the original task of converting these people to Christianity, that one of the missionaries named his memoirs, '*Drunk Before Dawn*'. These days, their Borneo Evangelical Mission priests can marry, but they don't drink or smoke. It is strange how many western priests are celibate, but can drink and smoke. The people of Borneo, especially the orang ulu and other natives, have certainly taken to their own brand of Christianity with such a passion that they are sometimes referred to as the Malaysian Jews.

No one-day was the same in the weeks that followed. We traversed through Lun Bawang, Kelabit, Penan, Kenyah, Kayan then Iban lands. With few exceptions however, their rivers form the centrepiece of all their existence. They wash, excrete, fish and drink in them and use them as a highway. You are either a Lun Dayeh, people from up-river, or a Lun La'ud, people from down-river. Without exception, their societies are far from gender free, but interestingly Penan women seem to hold their own in open conversation, perhaps their jungle is still neutral. After eating rice three times a day we eventually could tell differences between hill and padi rice, harvested and store rice with ease. Unlike Z who fought both Japs and near starvation, we did it in the fruit season and added sago, deer, buffalo, fern and bamboo to our daily fare. Mornings were generally a competition between dogs, roosters, Christian bamboo gongs and occasionally a Mullah to announce the start of the day. Most nights were spent in kampungs with the evenings engrossed in trilingual conversations as we sought and met over sixty guerrillas. Most of the original Semut fighters are now dead, but of those we encountered many had obviously only been teenagers when part of Semut. One morning as we poled and motored a long boat up the Limbang River, with one of the old guerrillas in charge of the proceedings. Praying before getting into their boats was a somewhat

un-nerving experience, but surfing down rapids was as close to existentialism as you can get, and deserving of prior entreaty. Walking with the Penan of Sarawak was just simply the best. These people are incredible bushman. They varied from hunters still dressed in loincloth and equipped with blowpipe and spear, to those prepared to take action to blockade the loggers. Some nights we found ourselves treating their ailments ranging from malaria to rotting teeth. In their more settled kampungs I often ended up addressing the entire community and trying to help them find ways to come to terms with the loss of their forests, the pollution of their rivers and in turn their whole way of life. During our trek it was general knowledge that there were three active blockades by Penans. While the jungle is losing the logging war, many of the WWII tracks that existed before time, are now overgrown and travel by foot has become impossible. In some places you can now take a thirty-minute flight for ten dollars, where once you walked for at least two days.



Driver Phillip Henry (Semut I Operative) with guerrillas Agong (Chinese) and Usop (Malay) on the Limbang River, July 1945. Henry's .45 pistol is pointed at a smoked head.

, As we headed back down the mighty Baram River towards the coast to pick up a reinforcement in Brunei town, we were pleasantly surprised one evening to be treated to a traditional welcome in a Temengong's house. It involved sculling whiskey at the end of a lilting Kenyah song, and you could tell that the old grandmother handing out the grog was flashing back to the coming of the original tuans. Tuan originally had the connotation of white man, but it now refers more to a respected male. On another occasion as we poled up the Sembakung River between Kalimantan and Sabah, we were greeted by traditional Taggal dancing which continued through to six o'clock the next morning. Not to be outdone, the same thing happened in the next kampung. After two nights without sleep, I was happy to curl up in my jungle hammock. Nights were an experience unto themselves. Sometimes we would lie on bamboo mats waiting for our sweat to cool sufficiently to bring on sleep. Sometimes the crescendo of noise from animal life was as loud and incessant as Bourke Street traffic. You had to be careful in coastal towns as well, with many lodging houses doubling up as warehouses. Occasionally we were just saturated from rain, and tempting as it was to crash in the native sulaps (lean-to's) we generally took the time to build stretcher frames to evade jumping ants and like creatures. I could even sleep on concrete floors in the end. Man, this was Borneo.

You could tell that Borneo difficulties were catching up when Bruce O'Connor went off his rice. Not long after, a hernia brought him unstuck. Within a few days the dreaded Hornbill, an omen bird from earlier days,

Flew in the wrong direction and a log bridge gave way under Neil Thomas. Then constant mud bashing put Lefty Krikorian's heel on notice. My shoulder ached and breakfast became a menu of rice and pills. By comparison, the locals were far more stoic. One night we treated a man whom a snake had bitten. His family had resigned themselves to his death and was hesitant to seek help for him. The days continued to be a kaleidoscope of culture, language and shared military history as I learnt to simply add '....lah' to any English word I couldn't speak in bahasa. It was interesting to listen to the old men relate their fleeting contacts with Japs and the oft cutting of heads. Some we met in the padi fields, some walked for miles to see us, and some were almost overcome with emotion as they learnt of their tuans who were still alive in Australia. Many of them had fought again in Confrontation; the 'Javanese War' if you are Malaysian, sometimes on opposite sides of the border. This war, essentially between London and Jakarta, but fought in a jungle cabinet room, must surely rank as one of the more stupid this century. Many of the opposing Border Scouts, being relatives, simply met in secret and agreed what they would tell their neo-colonial bosses. We walked, usually in the river, past numerous spots where Indonesian Dayaks related stories of 'accidents' with an unknown enemy, and I could not help but think of my Australian SAS forebears who had lain in wait. During Operation Claret, patrols conducted deniable border crossings to ambush the Indonesian Army. Brothers in arms this time, Indonesian Kommandos joined us for our sojourn in East Kalimantan. At Long Bawan we shared some beers and looked out at the jungle, where previously SAS patrols had laid up, looking in.



*Iban Chief Penghulu Jampi with people from his longhouse on the Limbang River, July 1945.
Driver Henry considered the Ibans to be 'bloodthirsty' making for natural guerrillas.*

Before coming back to the coast, an ascent of Mount Kinabalu was mandatory for me simply because it was there. Fit as fiddles after two months of trekking, we virtually ran to the top and down in the spirit of adventure (semangat tualangan). Dressed in jungle clothes and wearing socks as gloves, it did not matter to us as we mingled on the summit with tourists wearing yuppie clothes. On our return to the coast, the cities were alive with the Chinese New Year (Gong Xi Fa Cai) followed in quick succession by Aidil Fitri, signalling the end to Ramadan and our expedition. In a few years all the Z men and their faithful Semut guerrillas will be dead. Retracing their steps was like going back in time, to their war within the world within. While we did not experience the fear of patrolling along single tracks or the adversity of guerrilla warfare, I felt privileged to meet them and listen to their stories - stories I now have, with the hope that they are told to a wider audience.



The five 'other ranks' of the original Semut II party. Sergeant Bob Long, Sergeant Wally Pare, Warrant Officer Shorty Horsnell, Sergeant The Soen Hin and Sergeant Abu Kassim.

Background

Lieutenant Colonel Jumbo Courtney⁸ and Major Jim Truscott

In September 1944, strategic decisions by the allied governments virtually eliminated both South East Asia Command and Australia's military forces from the main campaign against Japan. This brought about a change for the better in the fortunes of the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD), who from February 1945, acted in the direct support of the 1st Australian Corps in the destruction of bypassed Japanese garrisons in New Guinea, British North Borneo and Sarawak. After a precarious existence for some years, SRD who had been reluctantly employed on tasks for which they were not properly fitted, were now asked to undertake their proper, special role. In November 1944, approval was obtained for the formation of a special RAAF flight of six, long range, liberator aircraft, later increased to eight, and this solved SRD's long-standing problem of strategic transport.⁹ In March and April 1945, three intelligence parties¹⁰ were parachuted into tribal territory in the interior of Sarawak. Allied officers who had served in, or spent time in Sarawak in various civilian capacities before the Japanese invasion commanded them, and they were familiar with the language and customs of the people. One of them, Tom Harrison is remembered bitterly by some operatives and with bemusement by others. There is no doubt that he was the archetypal eccentric Englishman. Tragically due to a typographical error, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in London had sent out the wrong man. The Semut parties were received with initial scepticism, then enthusiasm, by the interior tribes who were bitterly opposed to the Japanese after three years of shortages and oppression. In small groups, sometimes singly, operatives then proceeded to covertly penetrate down the river valleys towards the coast, training and arming some already warlike natives and persuading others to become involved, in preparation for small scale attacks on the Japanese, in support of, and following the eventual invasion by Australian forces. They were able to provide much pre-invasion tactical intelligence for 1st Australian Corps by whom, unfortunately, their potential use was not always appreciated. However, the assault on Labuan and Brunei Bay by the 9th Australian Division on 10 June 1945 was the signal for an all out guerrilla offensive against the Japanese forces concentrated near the coast. This unexpected threat from the rear had the effect of discouraging the Japanese from their usual reaction, which was to counter-attack invading troops before they could be established.

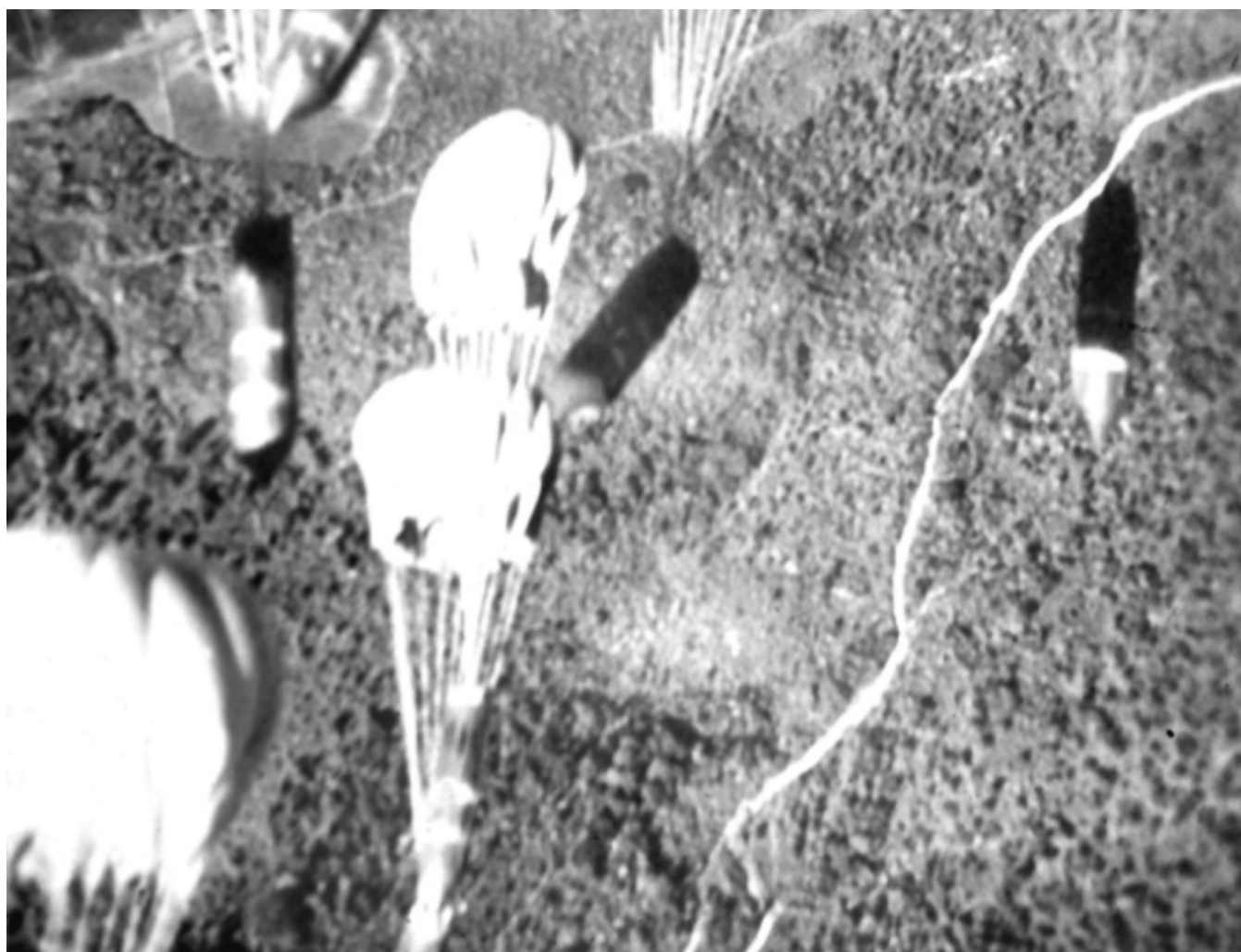
After the success of the initial assault, Australia's regular forces were confined to the coastal areas of the oil fields and the main towns, by order from the government in Canberra; they made no move to penetrate inland, in order to minimise casualties. It devolved upon the guerrilla forces with the invaluable help of the RAAF, to try and contain the movement of enemy troops through the interior, and to restore some sort of stable civil administration among the very volatile tribes. They made no attempt to penetrate the capital Kuching, in the south of the country, as although there was a sizeable prisoner of war camp there, it was feared that the Japanese might be provoked into massacring the prisoners, as had happened in Sandakan in British North Borneo. After the official surrender of the Japanese on 15 August, Semut continued to cope alone with numerous active Japanese patrols including a large enemy column (the Fujino Tai) which refused to surrender, and which was doggedly marching inland pillaging the longhouses and shooting the inhabitants. The Japanese headquarters on Sapong Estate at Tenom in British North Borneo (now Sabah) did not surrender until some time in September. The Japanese envoy then accompanying Semut was finally able to persuade the column to surrender at the end of October.

⁸ This article was originally written by LtCol G.B. Courtney. He was born in England and commissioned in the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment in 1935. He served in India, Palestine, Malta, and West Africa and in 1942, joined the Special Boat Section of the Army Commandos in Scotland. He operated in the Eastern Mediterranean from the end of 1942 through 1943, and in 1944, was posted to SOE in Ceylon. In July he joined Z Special Unit (SRD) in Australia as G2 (Plans) and, in 1945 was attached to HQ 9th Australian Division in Labuan as commander of SRD operations in Sarawak and British North Borneo. He returned to Australia in 1956 and now lives in Melbourne. He is the author of *Silent Feet*, the history of Z Special operations 1942-1945.

⁹ The aircraft were also modified to allow supply-filled containers known as 'Storepedos' to be dropped.

¹⁰ Semut III did not separate until 21 May 1945.

As originally planned, the project comprised two parties; a reconnaissance party and a main body to follow up after two weeks. By the end of the war four separate parties had evolved, primarily due to the distances involved, and the inability for the original headquarters group to maintain control. Semut I, the largest party, had its main headquarters at Belawit (closeby the original insertion location) but inside Dutch Borneo, now East Kalimantan. It operated as far south as long Nawang, as far east as Malinau near Tarakan and north into British North Borneo. Semut II, which was meant to be the main headquarters of all Semut parties, but ended up being an independent group, focused its efforts along the Baram and Tutoh Rivers and their tributaries, flowing from the interior towards Marudi close to the coast and Brunei. It initially established its headquarters at the old government fort at Long Akah on the Baram River. Semut III was an offshoot of Semut II, and it operated from the ulu after a horrendous stomp to the headwaters of the Rajang River in southern Sarawak. It then proceeded down river to the coast, with its most permanent headquarters at Kapit. Semut IV occurred later in 1945 and it operated coastal between Bintulu and Mukah. In some ways it was to protect Semut's flank, although it was more probably an excuse by SRD to get a slice of the residual action. Altogether, the Borneo Interior Force in today's Sarawak, Sabah and Kalimantan was credited with having accounted for some 1500 Japanese troops and auxiliaries killed, and 240 taken prisoner. This was accomplished by a total, at its highest, of 82 SRD officers and men, and approximately 2000 guerrillas, at a cost of about 30 natives and nobody from SRD. The operation was cost effective, but was it all worth it? It is probably true that Semut justified SRD's previous existence. The years of trial, error and frustration that went before, were the price that was paid by an organisation that started from scratch, unskilled and unloved. But those years did produce a high standard of professionalism in the end, which contributed significantly, not only to the military result, but also to the political stability of the British colonial possessions in the immediate post war period.



Storepedos brought in with the first reinforcements for Semut I on 27 May 1945 being dropped from 3000 feet over an area near Belawit in Dutch Borneo. The personnel and stores were supposed to be dropped at Lenbudut, a good half days walk from Belawit. Major Harrison was so favourably impressed with Belawit that he moved his headquarters there from Bario, a few days later. Work on the light aircraft strip commenced within days.



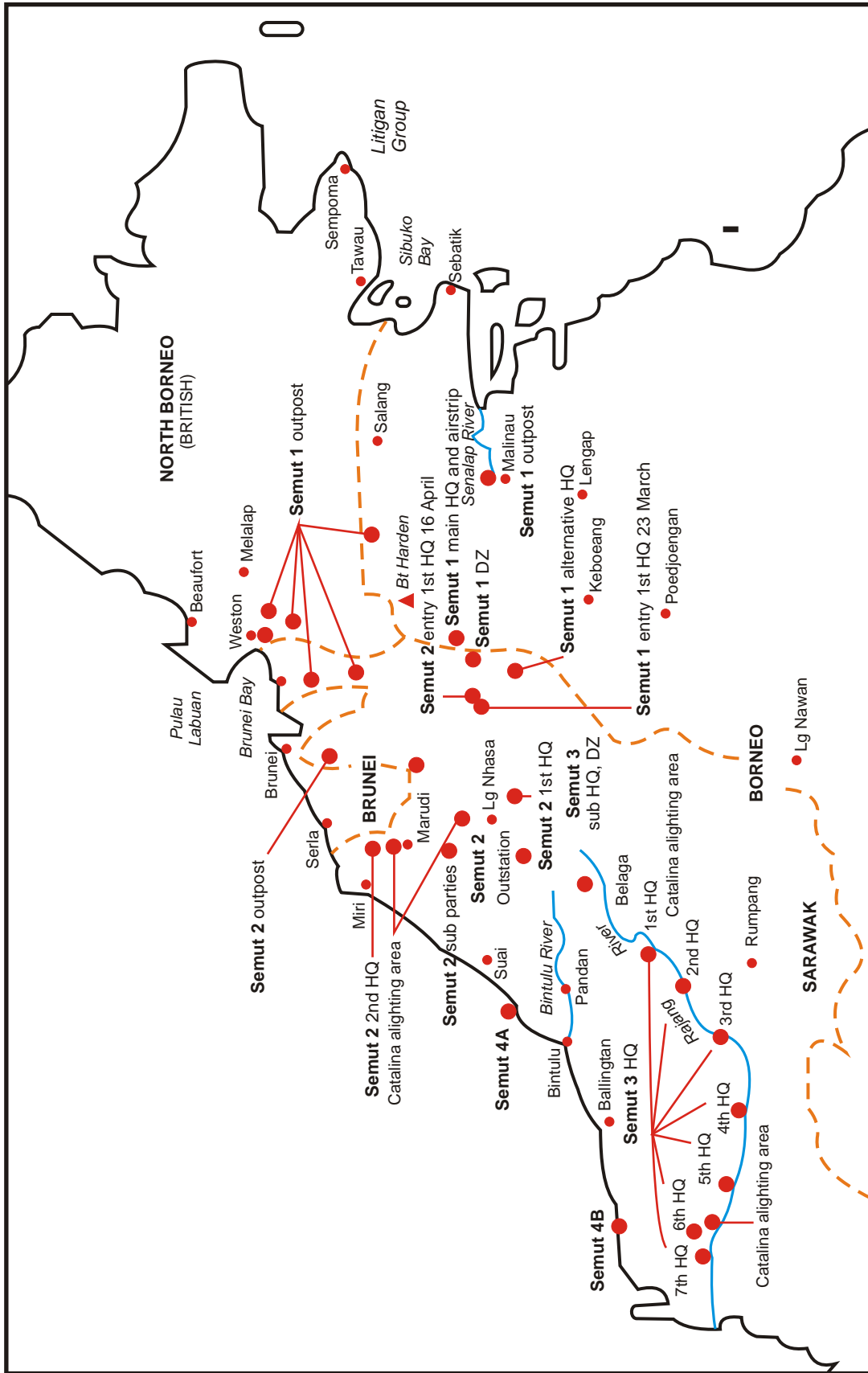
General Baba flew in from Sapong Estate rubber plantation. Note the cancelled rising sun.



Semut III at Labuan in October 1945.



Penghulu Tama Wen Agin wearing the Sarawak Long Service Medal and MBE presented at Mirion, 11 November 1947.



¹¹With the permission of Professor Powell, Emeritus Professor of History, Northern Territory University



Sergeant Jack Tredrea at Fraser Island in Queensland in November 1944. He was as fit as a Mallee bull at 5'7&1/2" and 10 stone 6lbs.

Command Perspectives

Two of the commanders involved with the planning and execution of Operation Semut were still alive in 1997. These were Sir John Holland who served as a Lieutenant Colonel and Director Technical Section on the Headquarters of SRD in Melbourne, and later as the Commander of the emerging Group D of SRD; and Lieutenant Colonel Jumbo Courtney¹², who after also serving on the Headquarters as the G2 Plans (Major), became the Commander of Group A¹³ (at Moratai, later Labuan) with responsibility for Semut and other operations. Their views are important in placing Semut into a commander's perspective, as it would appear that the official files have been stripped. John Holland¹⁴ confirms that under instruction from SRD, he destroyed all records, which had anything to do with operations. This action is acknowledged by Lieutenant Rowan Waddy¹⁵ of Semut IV, who makes the comment that Semut IV's files are very scanty and do not even make mention of him being nearly charged with the murder of a member of the Kempai Tai on 2 September 1945, after the war had officially ended. Furthermore, archived operational files at Mitchell in Canberra show little indication of detailed operational planning. It could be that there was little planning to be done, as after all it was 1945 and the Allies had developed much expertise in the conduct of special operations. Sergeant Fred Sanderson of Semut I wrote that 'About 15 years ago, the late Allen Wood, our unit historian approached Canberra archives for records of Z Special Unit. Records of many personnel including (the) Agas leader, myself, and many others. We were recorded (as being) killed, after the 1945 war. Allen Wood was amazed and informed the person in charge we were just (as) alive now as they were. It was my opinion that the department did not want to be bothered with further recording.'¹⁶

Regardless of what happened to Semut's official files, what is known of the dealings between Group A and Semut's field parties, gives an insight into the 'centralised control, decentralised execution' relationship of guerrilla warfare. For example, at a very critical stage in Semut's entry, Major Tom Harrison¹⁷ who led the reconnaissance party, refused to give the only working radio in country to Major Toby Carter who at that stage was the overall leader, and located about five days walk away. According to Lieutenant Colonel Courtney, Harrison was not sacked because the incident took place at a crucial stage in the campaign for 9th Division. Warrant Officer Col McPherson,¹⁸ an experienced Semut I operative, makes the comment that, 'Who would have sacked Harrison? And how would it have been done? Until the airstrip was built at Belawit, the only way in was by parachute and there was no way out until coastal areas were secured by 9 Aust Div.'

Tom Harrison¹⁹, the leader of the eventual Semut I party, stated in relation to his acceptance of orders that '... this is not to say I did not obey orders. I obeyed all I could, and explained when I could not. It was the only method of operating within Borneo with effect'. If this is true, then Group A was truly the 'meat in the sandwich' between Semut and 9th Division. Warrant Officer Bob Long said that 'At the time Semut I had the only contact back to Darwin. Harrison obviously did not want to be "off the air" and perhaps he thought to close down our W/T contact and transport the hand generator over 100 miles of jungle tracks with the existing humidity and rain it may fail by the time it reached its new destination.'²⁰ Sergeant Frank Wigzell, another Semut I radio operator,

¹² LtCol Courtney is the author of *Silent Feet*.

¹³ Group A was one of four regional groups. Under the then Major Courtney's command, Group A's HQ moved from Melbourne to Moratai in March 1945. On 23 June, after the initial 9th Division landings, the HQ was moved to Labuan Island. Group A was responsible for Sarawak, British North Borneo and the China Sea (excluding Malaya).

¹⁴ Letter dated 27 May 1997.

¹⁵ Letter dated 4 June 1997.

¹⁶ Letter dated April 1997.

¹⁷ For Harrison's view of Semut see, *World Within, A Borneo Story*, Tom Harrison, Cresset Press, London, 1959.

¹⁸ Letter dated 11 November 1997.

¹⁹ *World Within, A Borneo Story*.

²⁰ Letters dated early 1997 and 24 October 1997.

advised that it was not the radio, but the hand generator as its output was incorrectly set and could not operate the set. He blames the base for not inspecting the gear prior to its dispatch. Lieutenant Eadie, Semut II, further confirmed in his letter of Nov 97 that once he had adjusted the modified power pack for the Midget Communication Receiver (MCR), he was confronted by a mismatched antenna. A length of wire eventually corrected the problem!

Lieutenant Colonel Courtney²¹ says that 'Group A treated Harrisson as an uncontrollable force to be supported through thick and thin as far as relations with 9th Division were concerned. For overall control, Harrisson took his orders by radio direct from HQ SRD in Moratai. Relations between Group A and 9th Division were distant until physical contact started between SRD operatives on the ground and forward parties of 9th Division. Thereafter there was friction due to differences between guerrilla and regular behaviour, and the basic type of tactical intelligence provided by the former.' According to Warrant Officer Bob Long, the main radio operator for Semut I, 'The Harrisson attitude manifesting itself in messages would not have helped.'²² Lieutenant Rowan Waddy, Semut IV says that from his party leader's perspective (Major Bill Jenkins) that Headquarters 9th Division and HQ SRD did not see eye to eye as the then Major Jumbo Courtney was British. Major Jenkins had to smooth most dealings between the two, and the general feeling was that special operations were not at all popular with regular units.

Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh, a Semut I operative, believes 'That Group A was "the meat in the sandwich" was due to letting Harrisson run amok. The 9th Div, as were the other Divisions, was after five odd years of war, an efficient and organised bunch of professional soldiers. They had little time for a pip-squeak Major dressed in a sarong, pistol on hip, with a Majors badge stuck on his cap instead of on his shoulder, sauntering around in his bare feet. It must have been a shock for Harrisson too, instead of the awe struck adulation he had been accustomed to from the inland natives he was confronted by senior officers asking a lot of tactical and strategic questions, enemy order of battle, locations etc. He would not have been able to answer much of this, as he had never, to my knowledge, specifically directed any operatives to gather intelligence. I think that 9 Div was disappointed with what they perceived as incompetence on our part and Group A suffered accordingly.'²³ However Warrant Officer McPherson points out that he did receive a wide range of intelligence requests, delivered by Edmeades on Harrisson's instructions, but that he²⁴ believes that 'it was fairly common knowledge that Jumbo Courtney was promoted to LTCOL following the setting up of SRD Adv HQ on Labuan, to sort out the situation which had developed between the three Majors who led Semut I, II and III respectively.

Clearly there was little that Group A could do to influence events on the ground, with the possible exception of providing weapons and ammunition. Another example of this disconnect is Harrisson's orders (perhaps rather grandiose) directing guerrilla advances on the Headquarters of the 37th Japanese Army at Sapong Estate at Tenom, and other concentrations at Pensiangan within British North Borneo. Group A did not concur with these advances, which while they could be seen in retrospect as strategically brilliant and outwardly tactically workable, they were actually regarded as more indicative of his personal political ambitions at the time. Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh says that 'It was good tactics as these standing patrols would have been able to give the first alarm had Gen Baba decided to move out, however, with the usual lack of foresight no provision was made for supply. I had to make a forced march to Malaman, extract some rice from the Chinese store and return forth-with. I did bomb a few fish pools downstream to obtain fish which came in very handy but I was deeply concerned that the deep muffled noises might be heard upstream by any Jap patrol.'

However, Warrant Officer Col McPherson²⁵ dismisses any notion as to the viability of these plans, 'The various accounts of us being ready to attack the Japanese garrisons in the Sapong Estate/Tenom area and Pensiangan respectively at the time of the Japanese surrender, can be traced to the pie in the sky plan conceived by Tom

²¹ Letter from LtCol Courtney.

²² Letter dated early 1997 and 24 October 1997.

²³ Letter dated 17 April 1997.

²⁴ Letter dated 11 November 1997.

²⁵ Letter dated 13 October 1997.

Harrison with complete disregard for the capability of the troops who were to be involved, the attitude of the local kampungs to such an operation (they would be the immediate targets for Japanese Army retaliation), the complete absence of realistic tactical and logistical supply plans (especially for the Padas sector) and last and by no means least, the poor state of health by this time of both white operatives and their native troops, again in the Padas sector.'

It was also Major Tom Harrison who unilaterally decided to cross into Dutch Borneo without the approval of SRD, or the agreement of the Dutch representatives within AIB. It would also appear that the fact that there were three Dutch corporals in Semut I, had nothing to do with approval to operate in Dutch Territory, as these men had merely escaped from conscripted service in the Japanese Army. For this politically sensitive action, Harrison was recalled to Australia during the course of Semut, to account for his actions and obtain belated approval. In retrospect it was a logical action, there being few rules in guerrilla warfare other than to win. In essence, Group A had no tactical control of Semut as this was exercised by SRD HQ by radio from Moratai.

On balance, one of the original operatives, Sergeant Keith Barrie argues that 'In the context of the initial operation I think the complaint about operating in Dutch territory without official sanction strikes me as nit-picking. Apart from what we had learned from Schneeberger, the country was a closed book and it was our job to do whatever was necessary to unseat the Japanese. Still I was a mere operative not a politician.²⁶' Warrant Officer Col McPherson²⁷ agrees with Barrie as he 'doubt(s) that Harrison "planned" to enter Dutch Borneo prior to insertion. It is more likely that he regarded Borneo as a single entity, notwithstanding that the Semut operations were intended to be limited to Sarawak. Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh argues that Harrison withheld combat supplies from operatives because of Harrison's 'master plan for operation "Borneo is Indivisible" his stated and written plan of integrating both British and Dutch Borneo.' Griffiths-Marsh also believes that Harrison simply had an unbalanced mind and offers this as the only satisfactory explanation of many of his actions.

The political separation of Semut from activities in Dutch Borneo may also explain why Semut was not used near Tarakan to assist this difficult Australian operation on 1 May 1945. Recent research indicates that 'While intelligence supplied by photographic reconnaissance and 'Ultra' decrypts was ample, for the most part it disclosed physical features, such as defences or Japanese strengths. Advice from émigré Dutch officials could be inconsistent, and in any case was years old. The planners relied upon the clandestine Services Reconnaissance Department to mount missions to Tarakan and surrounding islands in search of information obtainable only by observation and, if possible, interrogation of the island's inhabitants. From November 1944 Tarakan became the first priority on SRD's list of target areas, in expectation of an Allied advance into the Netherlands Indies, and began planning a series of operations code-named 'Squirrel.' In April, a Catalina of 113 Air Sea Rescue Flight landed three times to take Indonesians from fishing boats or coastal villages..... Not until late April, however, did the second phase open, with a party approaching Tarakan itself, and then only to obtain intelligence relating to areas of secondary importance to the impending invasion. SRD, seemingly preoccupied with an inter-service power struggle to maintain its independence, provide limited aid to the planners of (Operation) Oboe One.'²⁸ It is unknown what information, if any, was obtained from electronic warfare to assist Semut's planning or conduct. The absence of information may explain Semut's slow start.

To see another command perspective, it is worth reviewing how Semut was conceived. Sir John Holland's²⁹ recollections are that 'the initiative for operations in Borneo first of all came from SOE in the United Kingdom. As far as his Directorate was concerned, the progress of the war in the Pacific at the time was encouraging and Borneo represented a new opportunity for special operations at a time when prospects for obtaining transport by air and sea were gradually improving. They were all most enthused. The principles objectives were to establish a British/

²⁶ Letter dated 26 October 1997.

²⁷ Letter dated 11 November 1997.

²⁸ Tarakan, An Australian Tragedy, Peter Stanley, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, p.58.

²⁹ Letter dated 11 November 1997.

Australian presence in Borneo which post war would lead to the re-establishment of a British controlled civil administration; to gain intelligence information which would assist the landings and the establishment of Allied assault forces and to recruit, train, supply and direct indigenous forces in harassing operations against the Japanese.' These objectives help to explain how Semut very much started as an experiment, and then simply capitalised on success. 'The initial planning had started in February 1944 and a preliminary plan was produced and submitted to GHQ in May 1944. It was followed by an outline plan, issued on the 16th September 1944. Early approval was not granted owing to the low position of Semut's area in GHQ's list of priorities and to difficulties in supplying submarine transport. ...To meet changing conditions, a revised plan was drawn up on 11 Nov 44. It provided for an early insertion by parachute and focused the initial activities of a party on the hinterland of Brunei Bay. This final plan was submitted to GHQ on 24 Nov 44 and eventually approved early in the following month. ... Captain Crowther, who had been employed in Sarawak before the war and had an extensive knowledge of the country, joined SRD in Feb 44 and took up appointment of D/H (O/C Sarawak Country Section). He was in charge of planning and staff work for Semut from its inception until 27 Aug 45 when Major Ednie-Brown succeeded him to the appointment. Lieutenant Palmer was the Staff Officer in charge of Semut stores, and took over the Sarawak Country Section when Major Ednie-Brown was transferred to Adv HQ SRD.³⁰'

The planning for Semut had actually started in mid 1944, when the probability of success remained uncertain, seemingly daunted by the lack of a viable means of insertion. Initial planning was based upon a submarine insertion, which in retrospect was fraught with folly. However GHQ's approval was received too late for a submarine insertion³¹ to be effected before the break of the northeast monsoon. The Commander of Group A who had arrived in Australia in mid-1944 after several years experience of clandestine landings on enemy shores said that he would have advised against a submarine landing in this case, in view of the doubtful loyalty of coastal Malays and Ibans. There is no doubt that surprise would have been lost if stores had been carried inland through coastal regions. It may well have been Major Toby Carter's attitude towards parachuting that led planners to persist with the submarine plan. He withdrew from his parachute course so as to not risk any injury prior to actually parachuting in. The decision to parachute into the interior was very much Harrison's idea, and this could also explain why Major Carter let Harrison lead the Reconnaissance Party,³² that subsequently led to Harrison's insubordination over the radio and the decision for Semut I to report independently to Morotai. The drop zone information was obtained from a Shell Company geologist, Dr Werner Schneeberger, who had travelled through the Bario area, and not from Harrison's pre-war expedition experience in the Tutoh River area, which is some distance from Bario, as is commonly put forward by way of explanation in other accounts. However, Sergeant Dennis Sheppard who later served under Major Carter in Semut II, was actually a parachute training instructor at Richmond when Major Carter was under training. He believes that he 'made one or two para drops.....(but) ...that Major Carter was not a robust, athletic type and expressed his concern to me that a serious physical injury, a broken leg or arm would preclude him from carrying out his leadership mission "somewhere up north". In hindsight and with my latter knowledge of Semut II operations his assessment (to withdraw himself from the course) was absolutely correct and beyond doubt.³³ Again Sergeant Dennis Sheppard believes that it was only proper that someone else should lead the Pilot Team into an unfamiliar area, and that 'I can only guess that if the Pilot Team had been unsuccessful at Bario then a drop at Long Akah would have taken place.³⁴'

The reality was that the Baram River (and Long Akah) was not very central from a co-ordinating headquarter's perspective. It is probably more likely that it was selected simply due to Major Carter's pre-war experience with the area. The fact that there was a significant concentration of Japanese at Miri (which is closeby) may have influenced the decision as well. It was certainly a long way from the Japanese headquarters at Sapong Estate near Tenom in British North Borneo. Quite possibly, even if the radio incident didn't occur, sheer distance would have

³⁰ Letter from Sgt Wigzell, Semut I, dated 25 May 1997. It is assessed that Capt George Crowther was too old to deploy into the field.

³¹ Training was carried out in Port Phillip Bay with inflatable craft..

³² The Pilot Team parachuted in on 25 March and Major Carter parachuted in on 16 April 1945.

³³ Letter dated late 1997.

³⁴ Ibid.

necessitated separate commands. What remains unclear, is what was the Semut plan of action if the original pilot team was unsuccessful in winning the support of all Penghulus (village heads), and in this regard why Carter was not directed to go in first?

The uncertainty of success is at odds with Lieutenant Colonel Courtney's 1997 comments that Semut could not lose. When asked to what extent did SRD's experience in previous operations contribute to Semut's success, he stated that it was because Semut was in the right place at the right time and could not have failed. However, the fact that most of the operatives were battle hardened contributed significantly towards success. Warrant Officer Jack Tredrea, an original Semut I operative, disagreed with this assessment saying that only 'About 50% of operatives had been in previous battle conditions.' Sergeant Fred Sanderson, another original Semut I operative, 'doesn't think SRD experiences in previous operations contributed anything to Semut's success. SRD's experience were never quoted to Semut personnel. I personally think 80/90 % of Semut personnel had no battle or previous war experience. A fair number of the personnel were from the disbanded Armoured Division etc. On Semut I approximately 45/50 % personnel had their first overseas service in Borneo, 4 months or less. Only Griffiths-Marsh and myself served in North Africa and New Guinea prior to going to Borneo.' Sergeant Frank Wigzell, from Semut I, provided accurate statistics that reveal that eight members of Semut I had prior active service. Hence actually 81% were blooded in Borneo.

However, any uncertainty of success at the time could also explain why the logistics system was so slow to respond, when the decision was taken to evolve the mission from intelligence gathering to offensive guerrilla warfare. There was a subsequent problem in supplying sufficient weapons, possibly due the fact that logistics was originally based on only training 250 guerrillas in each Semut area. There is no information available to explain the rationale for this figure, but it was some time before administration resolved the substantial increase in guerrilla numbers. Sergeant Stroke Hayes, Semut I, composed a little ditty summing up the situation: 'If something don't happen, and that bloody soon, there'll be nobody left in the Padas Platoon.'" Warrant Officer McPherson³⁵ reports that they even had their 'native troops joining in, after a fashion.' Sergeant Keith Barrie³⁶ says that the dislocation in the build up could be due to the loss of three aircraft and crew from 200 Flight in quick succession. On 25 March 1945, B-24 #A72191 disappeared near British North Borneo while returning from the Semut I initial insertion. The second loss occurred on 17 May when B-24 #A72159 crashed while making a drop to Operation Sunfish on Timor. The third Liberator crashed near Borneo while supporting Operation Agas II.

It is also unclear if the Rajang River operation (Semut III) was planned from the start or if it was just a subsequent offshoot. It certainly took a long time to get Semut III into position from the interior. There was considerable operational risk taken by the party leader, then Captain Bill Sochon, in crossing from the Baram River through very difficult terrain to the headwaters of the Rajang River, departing Long Akah on 21 May. It is fair to say that Sochon's decision to head for Belaga and hope for resupply was risky but workable. Again Sochon knew the area he was going into, and this probably gave him the confidence to proceed. Sochon's later decision to walk into the large Japanese concentration at Sibu was also indicative of a man who took considerable risk. After being rebuffed in standoff attempts to obtain the surrender of the Japanese at Sibu, Sochon took four officers with him and walked into a meeting with the Japanese. This could be interpreted as either an act of sheer stupidity or of calculated risk. Sergeant Sheppard says that the establishment of Semut I and II allowed for the formation of Semut III, a domino effect. It is however possible to state the connection between Semut III, Semut IV and Operation Hippo with some certainty. Operation Hippo was to have been launched on Kuching from Semut III territory and it consisted of Chinese operatives from Canada. Hippo was to be led by a Canadian Chinese Captain Roger Chong, however it was never launched before the end of hostilities for fear of reprisals against the prisoners of war in Kuching. Hippo operatives simply continued to work along the Rajang River. Interestingly Lieutenant Rowan Waddy (Semut IV) states that the original planning for Hippo and Semut IV was very close, but it could be asked why Semut IV was not conducted closer to Kuching? Some operatives claim that it was designed to close the gap between Semut II and III, some say it was too protect Semut III's seaward flank, while others

³⁵Letter dated 11 November 1997.

³⁶Letter dated 16 April 1997.

suspect it was just an excuse to get operatives employed in an Australian Theatre of war. Originally called Operation Jaguar, Semut IV was to get former Operation Politician operatives to be doing something, until Operation Crocodile reached its second and subsequent phases. Crocodile was a submarine/folboat reconnaissance of islands and other locations in the South China Sea for Force 136, an offshoot of SOE. Was Semut IV just an excuse to get Z men deployed, or was it exploiting success or protecting Semut's flank? The answer is probably a combination of all three reasons to a greater or lesser extent.

Unlike the connection, albeit very distant, between Semut's parties, there would appear to have been no need to deconflict Semut and Agas. Agas, the Malay word for sandfly, was an operation similar in nature to Semut, with five separate parties and it was conducted solely in British North Borneo. Agas I was reasonably successful in training 150 natives, rescuing Allied prisoners and killing over 600 Japanese mainly through directed airstrikes. Despite Semut I's patrolling activity towards Sapong Estate, there was no attempt made to exploit the success of Semut near Pensiangan and Sapong by using Agas to come from the north. This was probably due more to the comparative lack of success of Agas overall, as much as the difficult terrain and lack of river valley access to Semut's areas. Warrant Col McPherson³⁷ advises that he was told 'not to proceed further North of a line joining Weston on Brunei Bay and Tenom, as another party was responsible for operations North of that line.' Despite this arbitrary boundary, Warrant Officer Jack Tredrea says that 'Harrisson made it quite clear to his men that he did not want any contact made with Semut 2 and 3, and Agas operatives. As he claims in "*World Within*" he found himself a Rajah! His command did not require of others.'³⁸

Agas was not nearly as successful, possibly due to the Taggals in their area who (some say) were allegedly pro-Japanese until the Japanese surrender. Warrant Officer Col McPherson³⁹ is at pains to point out that comments which have been made in the official history about the loyalty of the Taggals operating with Semut I are a complete 'fallacy based on the opinions of Harrisson and (Captain) Edmeades respectively and widely disseminated by them. These two officers were, in my opinion, unduly influenced by the beliefs of Christian Muruts living in the Terusan River valley and who were scared stiff of the heathen, tapai drinking head hunting, poisoning, spell casting Taggals at Eburu and elsewhere in the neighbouring Padas River Valley. It is true that Taggals from the Kampung of Ulu Tomani were responsible for the betrayal to the Japanese garrison at Sapong of four US airmen who sought their help. In an ensuing shoot-out all Americans were killed. The action of the Ulu Tomani Taggals was deplored by Labau Silok and other Taggal Headman in the region. (Sergeant) Stroke Hayes and I had continuous contact with Taggals from Eburu to Kuala Tomani and elsewhere in the Padas Sector for at least four months and have nothing but praise for the manner in which they supported us with food (which was in short supply), recruits, coolies, guides and loyalty. (Captain) Eric Edmeades had a change of heart following his first visit to Eburu at the end of July 1945 when he met Labau Silok for the first time. He was even more favourably impressed after going on patrol towards Sapong during the first week of August on which he was accompanied by Labau and some of his men, and Melulud from Kampung Sundip en route.'

It is intriguing to ask why there were no Australian officers in the main leadership roles. Most operatives do not agree the implication that Australian officers were not good enough. Lieutenant Colonel Courtney offers the opinion that British officers with previous experience in Sarawak were available and were known to some of the tribes and spoke the language. This is certainly true in Major Harrisson's case. Unfortunately Harrisson's field orders were often read childlike, contributing to the distaste with which his experienced Australian operatives viewed him. Warrant Officer Bob Long said that 'Many operatives found Harrisson's orders ridiculous. For instance, his order to WO1 Col McPherson to kill, capture or otherwise deal with General Baba at his 37th Army HQ.⁴⁰ Harrisson was actually selected by mistake in place of another guerrilla leader of considerable Spanish Civil War experience. Scepticism will always dog any interpretation of Harrisson. While Lieutenant Colonel Courtney believes that Harrisson decided to make his operatives live off the land so as not to waste space in available airdrops, this view is not shared by the operatives who saw it as symbolic of his post war political ambitions. Both

³⁷ Letter dated 11 November 1997.

³⁸ Letter dated 18 March 1997.

³⁹ Letter dated 24 November 1997.

⁴⁰ Letter dated early 1997 and 24 October 1997.

views could be true. According to Sergeant Fred Sanderson, 'The British officers in Borneo were engaged in the oil fields, and others in Malayan plantations and tin mines prior to the war, and others in the Police Force and Prisons, and none of them had military training. Tom Harrisson got the job but we ORs carried him in Borneo.⁴¹' Harrisson was egotistical and ruthless, his men willing workers and he drove them. At the same time he took to the rough himself when necessary.⁴² Their experience of, and knowledge of, Sarawak identified the other commanders. For example, Major Toby Carter was a New Zealander who had worked for Shell as a surveyor, and he knew people as well as the language. According to Warrant Officer Bob Long, 'Major Carter was a careful and considerate leader and perhaps not suited to such operations. On the other hand, Lieutenant Eadie argues that in Europe few operatives had much formal military training and consequently he did not see Carter as in any way unsuitable for operations in enemy territory which 'did not fit into normal military behaviour.'⁴³ Major Bill Sochon had served as the Singapore Prison Governor and in the Sarawak Constabulary prior to the war. Lieutenant Rowan Waddy says that few Australians had worked in Borneo and that Major Bill Jenkins from Semut IV, the only Australian party leader, was simply an ex 2/21st Battalion officer who had escaped from Ambon, who knew the language and understood jungle.

In answering the question of British leadership, Sergeant Keith Barrie cautions against revisionists building in anti-British prejudice as, 'Given the long British association with the Borneo Territories I did not find it strange that the leadership roles in the various operations were allocated to British personnel who had experience in those territories. I believe in principle it was sensible and to some extent vital, that this should be so to secure the co-operation of the locals. To have the Brits taking the leading roles in this region, in the context of the time was no more unusual than having them in the principal leadership role in the Middle East with the Australian 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions as part of that Army.'⁴⁴ Sir John Holland agrees. 'To me what was important was not the nationality but the quality of the man for leadership roles. While it was most logical to have involved in the various operations people who had knowledge acquired pre-war in the colonial service, commerce or industry, some of them were obviously unsuited for sensitive roles required by leadership in the specialised forces operating under harsh conditions in difficult conditions in difficult terrain. It is true also that some Australians adopted the childish attitude of "anything the Brits can do, we can do better." Most of those who had the privilege of serving with British units, and I was one, had the highest regard for both their leadership and fighting qualities. On the other hand, I consider that for political reasons, better all-round relationships, and hence performance in the field for all of SRD operations, would have been achieved if from the very early days the commander had been a senior Australian officer with a reputation for leadership of men, courage and performance in the field of battle and the skills of an experienced diplomat.'⁴⁵

Nonetheless, the only surviving party Second in Command in 1997, Captain David Kearney from Semut II, has a different view on the question of British officers leading Australian troops. He thought 'it was a mistake, and the higher the social status of the Brit, the bigger the mistake. I don't know how much these things have changed in Australia (he lives in Canada), but in those days we were still escaping from a colonial outlook. In any case, special operations have too many uncertainties built in; adding a national irritant was silly. The leaders should have been men experienced in special operations; specialists with local knowledge could work effectively as a staff function. "Tuan Pisser" was a good example of how this could be done.'⁴⁶ Kearney had met his team leader, Bill Sochon, at a party where after a considerable amount of beer, he offered him a job in Z and he accepted. Much later he 'landed on the Rajang a few miles upstream from Kapit. There I found Bill Sochon who outlined for me his plans for Semut III. My impression was that he had tackled a job that was pretty big for him, but he gradually grew into it. This was a common experience in WWII for most of us, but it meant that you make boobos and have to learn from them. I found him a good man to work for; he gave me a job and then left me alone to do it. After reading some of the Semut accounts, I'm very pleased I managed to pick him for a boss.'⁴⁷

⁴¹ Letter dated April 1997.

⁴² Letter dated early 1997 and 24 October 1997.

⁴³ Letter dated November 1997.

⁴⁴ Letter dated 26 October 1997.

⁴⁵ Letter dated 12 November 1997.

⁴⁶ Letter dated 28 December 1997.

⁴⁷ Letter dated 28 December 1997.

According to Sergeant Fred Sanderson, Semut I, 'Harrison first, started giving orders without knowing the situations, in the different districts he allotted us. He finally gave us a free hand in operations and (the) situation was more in control.... Harrison lived well and was mean in that respect. Self first, self always. A nature he cultivated from his young days. He had a rough upbringing I believe.⁴⁸' Warrant Officer Jack Tredrea believes 'Tom Harrison was obsessed with having his own command. He claimed to have been involved in the search of Dutch documents in Melbourne which were reputed to have details of a highland plateau. He did fly the recce flights, which found this area, and there is no doubt of his intention to spread his forces into Dutch territory. After Tarakan was taken Harrison made his way to Malinau, down the Sembakung River to Tarakan, thence to Queensland to attend an interview with the Dutch Consul which we were led to believe was stormy, no doubt H/Q AIB and H/Q SRD received a rocket from Dutch authorities. Harrison planned to unite Borneo and I don't doubt he had himself down as a very high official. Stockpiling food would have enabled him to remain in control in interior Borneo for months after the war passed by.⁴⁹' Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh adds That 'when Harrison held his borak drinking greeting ceremonies for visitors, complete with his honour guard of a platoon of sumpitan (blow gun) armed natives who drilled for his entertainment, only the British flag was flown or carried (his junior operatives were Australian, his supply and insertion was by 200 Sqn RAAF). There was no indication by Harrison of the Australian involvement.⁵⁰' Again Sergeant Barrie believes that another interpretation is more probable. 'In my own experience the only flags which came out of the woodwork when we arrived on the scene were the Union Flag and the Sarawak Flag both of which had been hidden during the occupation, on pain of death if discovered, and were only too familiar to the Borneo people. There were no Australian flags around anyway, and I doubt the inland people would have known where Australia was or who we were. Things changed later. In my experience among the locals there were two kinds of white men they knew - the "Orang Puteh" being the pre-war expatriates, mostly Brits, and the "Orang Belanda" the latter term being applied to the Dutch, which was not meant to be complimentary. I doubt there was much more significance to the borak parties than to massage Harrison's inflated ego, he would not have been concerned too much about anything else!⁵¹

Sadly, given the intelligence gathering role of Semut, it is fair to conclude that the operation, had little impact on the Brunei invasion; Semut II in particular as it was still setting up until 17 June 1945. Semut's intelligence was not used as had occurred with other SRD operations for the landings at Tarakan and Balikpapan, SRD Operations Stallion and Squirrel, and the manner in which Semut's little intelligence did reach HQ 1st Australian Corps and HQ 9th Division, has been described as haphazard and wasteful. Although Sergeant Frank Wigzell (Semut I) says that, 'Some 300 intelligence reports were sent out by wireless and about 40 full length reports in writing, large numbers of Japanese documents and maps were forwarded to the ATIS while some were analysed on the spot by Major I. Lloyd of that agency. Semut I. also obtained intelligence from 35 Japanese and 201 native auxiliaries taken prisoner⁵²' Why these had no impact on the landings cannot be assessed. Warrant Officer Bob Long said that their 'W/T was worked nightly back to Darwin for as long as it took to send and receive traffic enciphered in the one time pad. Later to Moratai and still later to Labuan. I cannot comment on (intelligence being) wasteful although Harrison did send much repetitive material. Haphazard, no. We never failed to make contact and pass traffic nightly.⁵³ Captain David Kearney's comments on training at Fraser Island give some explanation of problems in the Australian Army at the time. 'The school was aimed solely at producing guerrillas. There was no mention made, as far as I can recall, of obtaining intelligence in any disciplined way. There was no training in Jap army organisation, weapons or methods. Nor did Bill Sochon (Semut III) ever mention it to me, which I'm sure he would have it was seen as an important part of our role.⁵⁴

It is not clear if the move of Group A from Moratai to Labuan was part of the invasion plan, or put together later, nor indeed how intelligence liaison between Semut and Oboe, the amphibious landing, could be in any way be effective when Semut parties continued to report back to Moratai. Liaison within Semut parties was obviously

⁴⁸ Letter dated April 1997.

⁴⁹ Letter dated 18 March 1997.

⁵⁰ Letter dated 17 April 1997.

⁵¹ Letter dated 26 October 1997.

⁵² Letter dated 25 May 1997.

⁵³ Letter dated early 1997 and 24 October 1997.

⁵⁴ Letter dated 28 December 1997.

restricted by the speed and reporting accuracy of native runners. Given Semut II was so close to Miri, it must also be asked as to why it seemed to have relatively fewer tactical engagements? It is probably due to a number of factors; notably its small size compared with other parties, the personality of the leader whose strengths were administrative rather than operational, and the difficulty of penetrating coastal locations. For example Major Carter was withdrawn on surrender day to go to the Lintang prisoner of war camp in Kuching to assess the civilian internees and assist in their evacuation to Labuan, as he was personally known to many of the oil field people. Sergeant Wally Pare was 'led to believe (perhaps incorrectly) it was because he was fed up with the whole set up and what had happened.'⁵⁵ The official history of SRD records that 'Semut was originally intended to be a project based on the Baram River and to operate in Sarawak; its objective being to collect intelligence data ahead of the AIF coastal landings'.⁵⁶ This never eventuated.

The lessons from a commander's perspective are many. Firstly 'special operations should be costed and given sufficient resources to ensure their success. Without the allocation of sufficient finance and transport assets, an operation may well be doomed to failure before it starts'. Secondly, 'special operations should be controlled at the highest level, within a clearly defined chain of command. This will result in increased efficiency, as much of the friction caused through misunderstandings will be eliminated. Subordinate special operations HQs should ultimately answer to their own superior HQ. This will give them the flexibility often necessary to achieve their mission'. Thirdly, 'special operations HQs should use directive control. In an environment where communications are often difficult, operatives need to use their own initiative without reference to higher HQs'.⁵⁷ This tenant does not apply to "loose cannon" field commanders such as Tom Harrison.



Young kelabit mother and child from the Belawit area.

⁵⁵Letter dated 30 October 1997.

⁵⁶History of IASD & SRD. CRS A3270 Vol II, Part III, Operations in Borneo, p.25..

⁵⁷In Retrospect, Special Operations Headquarters, World War Two, by Command and Staff College, Fort Queenscliff, 19 September 1992.



Warrant Officer Class One Col McPherson in 1944, when RSM of 1 Australian Para Training Centre.



Sergeant Tredrea met a RAAF workboat at Malnau in September 1945. The chap in the big hat was the first whiteman he had seen in three months. The others are his guerrillas.



At Babaloc in July 1945, Sergeant Jack Tredrea's guerrillas killed three Japanese on this patrol.

Operative Perspectives

The experiences of the Semut Operatives who were still alive in 1996 varied considerably between those who were the original contact men at Bario, and those who came in as reinforcements towards the end of the war. Some were scornful of others, who in their eyes had embellished their actions over the years. Others expressed amazement that some operatives took notes or kept diaries, as that was contrary to their orders. Others still, saw it as important that records be kept of events, personnel, contacts and local intelligence matters as the natural consequence of training as a professional soldier. There is no doubt that orders to individual operatives varied considerably, as did styles between party leaders and the professional training of operatives. For example, on travelling downriver in a prahu for the first time, Driver Phil Henry (Semut I) was to discover that he hadn't been told that there were crocodiles in tropical rivers. I interviewed and/or corresponded with WO1 Col MacPherson, WO2 Jack Tredrea, WO2 Bob Long, Sgt Fred Sanderson, Sgt Wally Rippin, Sgt Frank Wigzell, Sgt Kel Hallam, Cpl Roland Griffiths-Marsh and Dvr Phil Henry all from Semut I. Sgt Keith Barrie from Semut I, II & III. Lt Snowy Middleton, Lt W. Eadie, Sgt Frank Pippen, Sgt Wally Pare and Sgt Danny Shepherd all from Semut II. Capt David Kearney, Lt Frank Oldham, Sgt Gordon Philpot, Cpl Des Foster, Cpl Ross Bradbury and Cpl Brian Walpole all from Semut III. Lt Rowan Waddy, Lt John Walne, Lt Alex Hawkins and Lt Hugh Ellis from Semut IV. It is not the intention of this monograph to repeat what has already been told in numerous personal accounts, and I have only included previously unpublished oral stories and their Order of Battle. I simply refer readers to the existing publications, with a brief summary of each:

Semut I, II, III & IV. Both *War by Stealth* by Professor Powell and *Silent Feet, The History of 'Z' Special Operations 1942-1945*, G.B. Courtney, MBE, MC, McPhersons Printing Group, 1993, provide excellent summaries of the relationships between the four parties, as well as accounts of their individual actions.

Semut I. This party has the most extensive accounts of individual operatives' actions. Refer to twenty separate accounts in *Operation Semut I, 'Z' Special Unit's Secret War, Soldiering with the Head-hunters of Borneo*, Bob Long, Transpareon Press, 1989, *World Within - a Borneo Story* by Tom Harrisson, *Six Penny Soldier* by Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh, republished under the title *I was only Sixteen* and *New Zealand Army Involvement Special Operations Australia, A.I.B.* by Sergeant Frank Wigzell.

Semut II. There are no published accounts, but Lieutenant Colonel Courtney and others hold Major Carter's manuscript. Excerpts of the account are published in *Silent Feet*.

Semut III. Again there are no published accounts. Sergeant Keith Barrie's *Borneo Story*, K. Barrie's papers, Unpublished, 1992, is the best source. Lieutenant Colonel Courtney holds Major Sochon's manuscript and excerpts are published in *Silent Feet*.

Semut IV. *On Operations With Z Special Unit - WWII*, Rowan E. Waddy, self published in 1995, is the only known account.

The official history gives some insight into the characters involved. They were all very professional and independent men. 'Some of the difficulties encountered by the A.I.B. stemmed from the fact that it had to co-ordinate four separate national groups with differing aims and allegiances; some, undoubtedly, from the fact that the kind of organisation it controlled tends to attract men who are not only adventurous but imaginative, individualistic and temperamental to an unusual degree. Such men are enthusiasts who see their own chosen

activity, whether it be propaganda, sabotage, or irregular warfare, as exerting a far greater effect on the progress of the war than it actually did.⁵⁸ This should not be read as any belittlement of the men involved. The accounts of their personal bravery in the face of deprivation bear testament to their individual contribution, and Australian Special Forces still draw on their exploits to benchmark its modern culture.

The range of operatives' physical experiences are immense, from parachuting into foreign drop zones which included swamps, trees and crocodile inhabited rivers, through to walking without adequate maps, hunger and acute physical hardship. Flying times into Borneo were in the order of six hours from Moratai. One group was dropped into the wrong valley. This happened to Lieutenant Jeff Westley's party containing Corporal Allen Wheelhouse, Corporal Harry Sterelny and Driver Phil Henry who on 27 May 1945 jumped quite high at 3500 feet. A following aircraft contained Lieutenant Bob Pinkerton, Warrant Officer Col McPherson, Warrant Officer Ray Hirst and Trooper Bob Griffiths, and they jumped from 3000 feet. Westley and his men were the first reinforcements to Semut I, apart from Major Carter's parachute jump. According to Warrant Officer Bob Long, 'Harrison's pilot team were thought to have been captured or killed as the only message received was unreadable. Major Carter decided to follow but gave all his team an opportunity to back out. No one took the offer. Perhaps it was thought that Harrison was expendable.⁵⁹ Prior to departing Australia, Westley had been briefed by Brigadier Wills from the AIB. Signals received from Semut I were weak and with garbled code and there was a strong possibility that the party had been captured by the Japanese and that the wireless operator was working under duress. On arriving over Lembudut, the drop zone was found to be obscured by cloud and Lt Westley decided to drop at the clearest area available. There were two reasons for this decision. Firstly it would be unwise to drop without a reasonable knowledge of the terrain below. Secondly, with the chance that the advance party had been compromised, it made sense to drop some miles away with the possibility of remaining an efficient fighting force for as long as ammunition lasted.⁶⁰ This was and still is the nature of parachute operations in the cloud laden mountainous interior. When Sergeant Dennis Shepherd (Semut II) jumped into Long Akah, it had been some eighteen months since he had been a parachute instructor and packed his own parachute. None the less he had to pack his own parachute and his party members' parachutes at Mindoro the night before they jumped. He decided to pack them the same way to the best of his memory, and they all opened successfully.

There are other amazing stories of operatives working in ones and twos in isolated areas. Sickness and disease were common features of operative's accounts. Lieutenant Eadie from Semut II, considers this to be more a problem with Semut I operatives as Major Harrison had fallen out with his Medical Officer, Captain McCallum, who had then transferred to Semut II. That all survived, some facing acute health problems for many years after the war, speaks of the personal strength of the men selected for special operations. Many operatives' perspectives are also significantly influenced by the personalities of the party leaders that they served under. Major Tom Harrison, the eccentric leader of Semut I, was quoted as saying that " if any of us had anything to do with native women he would personally shoot us." This must have had a strong impact on the many Australians who worked for him. The reality was that the operatives had to live with the natives. Former Kelabit guerrillas alleged that Harrison had two local wives in addition to a white wife. He abandoned the first, as she was low class. Whether this occurred during or after the war remains unclear. At the time this behaviour was not unusual, and the events may not necessarily be defamatory to him.

Some operatives like Driver Phil Henry felt that the imperative to learn the language in country was like a Robinson and Crusoe exercise. Others like Sergeant Fred Sanderson could speak the local language quite well, and this attests to his personal success. Sergeant Sanderson actually returned to Bario during Confrontation, as a civilian and at Major Harrison's request to help the Kelabit people. But even he said that the 'language course was

⁵⁸ *The Final Campaigns*, Gavin Long, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, P.622.

⁵⁹ *The Final Campaigns*, Gavin Long, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, P.622.

Letters dated early 1997 and 24 October 1997. Both WO2 Long and Sgt Pare saw this message on Mindoro Island some hours before they parachuted into Bario.

⁶⁰ From Lt Westley's papers held by the SASR Historical Collection.

fast, rough, short. Malay pearl divers from Broome were recruited and camped with the others at Fraser Island. Malay was taught and spoken for the duration of our stay at Fraser. One month two months - about the limit.' \ Regardless of their ability to speak the tribal languages, operative's accounts are complete with descriptions of the 'world within' culture of the interior, such as Driver Henry's story of native girls doing the 'dance of the heads.' Why did operatives have such poor language skills? If intelligence was so important, why was there not greater effort spent on language training of operatives, particularly as the operation was planned for almost a year before insertion? Lieutenant Colonel Courtney's response is to ask why indeed? Lieutenant Rowan Waddy (Semut IV) says that the colloquial Malay learnt at Fraser Island was enough to get by, although in the eight week course for Group B.⁶¹ (18 January to 10 March 1945) there were only 31 periods of Malay instruction. Warrant Officer Bob Long commented that when 'Semut I landed in Bario, it was found that only one person had a knowledge of the Malay language. Penghulu Lawai having been jailed on the coast some years before had learnt some Malay. To make matters worse I recall that we Australians were taught the Malay language by a Scotsman.'⁶²

Captain David Kearney, Semut III, wrote that 'there was no serious effort to teach Malay, and no imagination used in teaching it. Australians of that generation were rarely interested in languages anyway, and few tried to learn. We were given a "dictionary", a list of about 500 useful words as I recall, and a few classes. Fortunately, after the "survival off the land course", where I was introduced to witchety grubs and palm tree salad, I decided that Malay would be essential if I had to depend on locals for food. I first learned the dictionary by heart then, when I got to Melbourne, I spent two hours a day with a Dutch woman that Berlitz found for me. In my first week on the Rajang, I found a young Chinese-Malay who was eager to be a batman, and I practised with him every day for the rest of my stay in Borneo. This was probably the most sensible thing I did in Semut. Commenting on the course generally, I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed it, and I think everyone else did too. All my criticisms rest on the fact that it didn't focus on what trainees would need to know and do when they got into the field. I suspect that the course was planned by Englishmen, with European experience. We spent hours and hours blowing up railway tracks, in teams working to a stop clock. I don't think they had any railways in Sarawak.'⁶³

Sergeant Keith Barrie had the unique experience of being one of the original Semut I members, then operating in Semut II and finally Semut III's area. Accordingly he is well respected by all operatives and his summation is accepted as accurate. 'So after seven months, and something like a trek of 400 miles by foot and by prahu, by the "Semut" III core party, without any major setbacks, it is useful to consider what are the principle lessons of the "Semut" operation. It seems to me that they were essentially two. The first and most important was that such a guerrilla operation could only be successful in the midst of a friendly and co-operative local population, ensuring the best intelligence and tactical support was available. Without that it would have been a failure. Secondly the decision to make the initial insertion by parachute into the central plateau area was the best means of ensuring that the first condition could be realised before the Jap military presence would be likely, and as a consequence, pressure on the local communities would be minimal. Having established this was so, we were able to exploit our tactical advantage to the utmost, thereby securing and maintaining the initiative from the beginning. We were fortunate that the Japs were sufficiently weakened to be unable to respond with an aerial counter-insurgency, in strength, of their own. With the benefit of hindsight, and the knowledge I now have of the difficulties, privations and harassment suffered by other S.R.D. parties in Borneo and elsewhere in 1943 and 1944, including capture torture and execution, it is clear that my own experiences were more of a tourist expedition than an insurgency operation. Those other parties were inserted by submarine into territory strongly occupied by the Japanese which meant the local population were constantly under the ruthless pressures and tortures imposed by the invaders extending to mass slaughter when it suited them. Thus those parties were operating in a much less secure environment than we were. By contrast our operations had the advantage of securing the high ground from the start with the local population relatively insulated against Jap reprisals of those less fortunate people in those earlier times and therefore providing us with a much more secure environment in which to operate. In fact much of

⁶¹Training program supplied by Sgt Wigzell.

⁶²Letter dated 24 October 1997.

⁶³Letter dated 28 December 1997.

the credit for frightening the Japs out of the Rajang (River) should go to the Ibans under the various Penghulus, Jugah, Sibat, Grinang, Jinggut and so on, who, with the backing of Temenggong Koh, took the initial aggressive action at Kapit risking reprisals by the Japs if our promised support had not eventuated. By comparison I have always felt a bit of a fraud. In recent years another ex-Sarawak civil servant expressed the opinion that the importance and success of the "Semut" III operation was the prevention of the wholesale killings of Chinese by the Ibans. He felt this was not generally recognised because of the preoccupation with the military aspect of the whole operation. If this was so, then I think the major credit has to go to the prestige and influence enjoyed by John Fisher⁶⁴ among the Ibans. So, as with most things, I doubt there is an absolute answer, so much depends on the perspective. One thing is certain though - it was the experience of a lifetime.'⁶⁵

Sergeant Frank Phippen⁶⁶ was also one of the few to work with Semut I, II and III. He originally parachuted into Long Akah onto the garden drop zone opposite the fort at the end of May 1945. He recalls that Penghulu Gau at Long Belun, lost his son in a guerrilla action. Phippen shot a Jap at the attack on the wireless station at Long Lama, worked with Sergeant Fred Sanderson on the Limbang River and ended up on the Rajang River in the end.

Prior to parachuting into the Bawang Valley⁶⁷ in June 1945, Sergeant Wally Rippin, Semut I was briefed in Moratai and told that he was not to keep any diaries or notes as this could endanger other operatives. He obeyed this order and was amazed at the publication of books in recent times that contained the day by day experiences of some operatives. He was stationed at the Headquarters of Semut I and whilst there he assisted Warrant Officer Bob Long, the wireless operator, to encode and decode messages from Australia, receive airdrops and arrange for stores and supplies to be taken to the stores hut. He was not impressed with the party leader who threatened him with court martial because he was sending supplies onto forward bases for other operatives. He went on several patrols with Captain Ric Edmeades who was a gallant officer and a great man. They patrolled the Trusan and Padas Rivers and went to Pa Tengoa three times after reports of Jap forces in the area, but each time they had gone. On one of these patrols with twenty guerrillas, Tom Harrisson dropped them a message from an Auster saying '10,000 Japs headed your way, intercept and destroy'. He and Rick Edmeades apparently had a great laugh. He took a small patrol to contact a 7th Division Section patrol from Balikpapan and met them after seven days march. They had to swim across three raging rivers to reach the meeting. They stayed overnight and then marched back for seven days. Any spare time he had at base, he trained Dayak tribesmen in ambush procedures and how to use weapons. They accounted for several Japs. He remembers six other operatives, Guru Paul from Bawang Valley, cold nights, mosquitoes and leeches. It was not until after the war, that he knew of the other thirty odd operatives in Semut I, let alone the other parties; he had only thought that there were fifteen of them. Sergeant Wally Rippin later served in the CMF retiring as a Major in 1970.

Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh⁶⁸, Semut I, explained how he was able to recall the roll of his guerrillas. 'At various stages my force varied from 30 odd to 90 odd, most times I only had 30 to 35 under my command. The original (list) is practically illegible; copy is not much better. I would keep this list wrapped in oiled silk and bury it at a place only known to me, then when I moved to another safe base I would dig up same and keep it in my ammunition pouch ready to throw it away if we were jumped by the Nips. This was bad security but I wanted a record so that any widows of my men would receive some compensation, as well as to recover the weapons issued after the war was over. I never let on to anyone about this action of mine, as the less another operative knew, the less he could compromise another operative. I did give a copy to Jumbo Courtney approx seven or eight years ago.' Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh had great respect and affection for his guerrillas. 'I tried to get him (Ah Toh) a decoration and several others but that bastard Harrisson did nothing about it. He only gave decorations to his sycophants.' To be fair to Harrisson, Mohd Yassin was awarded a BEM for his part in operations in the Padas sector/Brunei Bay area. In terms of actions on capture, Griffiths-Marsh said that he was 'Never instructed, in

⁶⁴ BBKAU officer with previous experience in Sarawak, whom the natives called Tuan Pisser as his name was unpronounceable.

⁶⁵ *Borneo Story*, K. Barrie, 1992, pps120-121.

⁶⁶ Conversation on 7 November 1996.

⁶⁷ Letters dated 16 Nov 96 and 31 Oct 97.

⁶⁸ Letter dated 10 March 1995. Cpl Griffiths-Marsh is the author of *Six Penny Soldier/I was only Sixteen*.

training or prior to insertion. I made my own arrangements, first with one dependable native guerrilla and after he was killed with another. If I was so badly wounded that I could not take my own life they were to shoot me. I would do the same for them. I had a great fear of falling into the hands of the Kempai Tai.'

Lieutenant Snowy Middleton⁶⁹ who inserted with Semut II, provided a former Top Secret patrol report dated 6 October 1945 detailing actions that occurred between the Belinau and Limbang Rivers between 2 and 27 September. This occurred well after the official surrender, and his orders were "to follow Jap forces and report on position of same." Lieutenant Middleton's group, including Sergeant Frank Wigzell and Corporal Graham were attacked by the Japanese three times in one day, including by grenades from cup dischargers. They suspected that they killed five Japs in return fire. These Japanese were believed to be under command of a Kempai Tai officer. Middleton said that the 'surrender' was not accepted by Semut and that fighting was still active until October 1945.

Sergeant Danny Shepherd⁷⁰ from Semut II, tells of an incident shortly after their arrival at Marudi. Two locals who had murdered a District Officer earlier in the war were captured and Major Carter was President of the court, which tried them and sentenced them to death. Sergeant Sheppard was never issued with the so-called 'L' tablet and did not remember having a cover story to explain his existence in the area. However he had no knowledge of operational numbers or exact areas of operation of Semut I and III. He was surprised to learn of the extent of Semut operations at the end of hostilities. In correspondence, Sergeant Shepherd expressed concern that an official report by Major Wilson, a fellow member of Semut II, on operations between 25 June and 14 July would remain uncorrected in Canberra's archives. He provided a lengthy correction of the report, supported by an exchange of letters with Major Carter in the mid 1980s. One can only conclude that Wilson embellished his actions at the 'Battle for Marudi', the ambush on the Baram River at Kuala Ridan on 10 July 1945. Carter was assessed as an idealist, his overall actions being motivated by operational orders and a compassion for the goodwill of the natives. Intelligence gathering and guerrilla training were carried out as normal duties, but the Major never lost sight of the long term strategy of fostering goodwill, civil administration where possible for the return of British colonial rule. Major Wilson was a man of limited vision, sometimes a violent person not interested in fostering goodwill. He was however a good fighting soldier, but (he) lacked the understanding of the need to foster native morale. Lieutenant Colonel Courtney stated that 'Wilson was put in as 2/i/c to Toby Carter in Semut II rather late in the day in 1945. He then proceeded to attempt to undermine Carter by staging a gung-ho program of aggression against the Japanese. In fact he went so far as to style himself as commanding Semut II. We regarded him as somewhat of a bullshit merchant and not to be taken seriously'.⁷¹ Sergeant Fred Sanderson said that according to Sergeant Wally Pare, the natives nicknamed Wilson 'Tuan Mabuk', meaning drunk, as he was seldom sober. Interestingly, Lieutenant Snowy Middleton said that Wilson had been decorated by both the Belgian and French authorities for his part in actions behind the lines in WWI and WWII, and was a surgeon in civilian life.

Experience with the L cyanide capsule varied. Sergeant Fred Sanderson says that 'I don't think I'm far wrong in saying that the only personnel who received potassium cyanide capsules were Harrisson's advance party. Harrisson, Edmeades, Sanderson, Tredrea, Cusack, Barrie, Bower and Hallam. It was really a case of everyman for himself - go anywhere and hope for the best.' Lieutenant Snowy Middleton, Semut II, said that 'We all carried a "Victory Pill"; cyanide in a rubber envelope; to be used in event of being captured and/or probably tortured.' Warrant Officer Bob Long confirmed that Major Carter issued the L pill to all of Semut II. Warrant Officer Col McPherson and those in the first reinforcement of Semut I were not issued with L capsules. Like Corporal Griffiths-Marsh, he 'intended to save the last round for (himself).'

⁶⁹ Letter dated 11 November 1996.

⁷⁰ Interview at Sydney in November 1996.

⁷¹ Letter dated November 1997.

Lieutenant Eadie⁷² was the only surviving British operative in 1997, and a Royal Signals Officer with SOE experience. He was part of Semut II and he operated around Long Berawan, now known as Long Terawan. He describes an arduous six day journey from Long Akah across difficult country to Long Berawan on the Tutoh River to look for Lieutenant Woods and his W/T operator who had gone missing. Finding no sign, he undertook a similarly arduous return. Lieutenant Woods had been pursued by a large party of Japanese and had escaped to Moratai, there to be parachuted back into Long Akah. He was still so shaken at Long Akah that he was returned to Moratai, and his W/T operator moved onto Semut III. After the Japanese capitulated Lieutenant Eadie returned to Long Berawan to find that the Japanese had burnt it down and the inhabitants had fled.

Lieutenant Frank Oldham's⁷³ experiences with Semut III include a very arduous patrol to Long Nawang in East Kalimantan. He left Belaga on 2 August 1945 and paddled up the Balui River to its source, climbed the 2000 foot pass and then went down the Kajan River to Long Nawang, one month later. On 3 September he and his native police boys 'kicked the Japs out' and held the village for six weeks while they uncovered the Dutch bodies from the 1942 massacres. Before Exercise Semut Retrace in 1997 he told me to look out for the Four Step snake, the Banded Krait as 'him bite you sir, you take four steps, fall over!'

Corporal Des Foster⁷⁴ from Semut III felt he did not contribute much. He was inserted between Kapit and Kanowit by Catalina and spent two to three months there before coming out at Sibiu. He received virtually no intelligence before going in, but considered that he had it easy, as the community was on their side. He spent most of the time living with the guerrillas in whatever accommodation was available, and he only visited the longhouses on a few occasions.

Sergeant Frank Wigzell⁷⁵ from Semut I, produced a summary of the air and sea maintenance of SRD field parties in January 1945. The break up gives a relative indication of rate of effort, and possible coverage and activity on the ground.

	Liberator Sorties	Catalina Sorties	Storpedoes / Parcels	SRD Craft	Weight LBS
Semut I	34	3	371	-	75,110
Semut II	12	8	97	-	35,852
Semut III	10	8	147	1	46,445
Semut IV	-	1	-	3	2,112

Lieutenant John Walne⁷⁶, Semut IV, points out that there are many inconsistencies in the various accounts of Semut IV. He wrote that 'the longhouse at Sebauh was their headquarters until we moved into Bintulu on the departure of the Japs. Prior to that it was Simalajau. This is not mentioned in *Silent Feet*. Walne, Buxton, Dodds and Corporal Campbell were inserted on the coast of the Simalajau River and went up the river to the longhouse. They eventually joined up with Lieutenant Claffey who arrived by Catalina well after their insertion and the rest of the 'mob' at Sebauh. Signaller Campbell did not arrive by Catalina. Peter McDougall (a RAN member of SRD) in Tigersnake dropped us off at Simalajau.' Lieutenant Hugh Ellis⁷⁷, also of Semut IV, 'obeyed orders and did not

⁷² Letter dated November 1997, from Scotland.

⁷³ Letter dated 23 September 1996.

⁷⁴ Conversation on 7 November 1996.

⁷⁵ Letter dated 25 May 1997.

⁷⁶ Letters dated 4 November 1996, 26 March 1997 and 11 November 1997.

⁷⁷ Letter dated 3 November 1997.

keep a diary or secrete a camera,' but he was unusual, being the only operative to serve in Japan, Korea and Vietnam, - an enviable record for a professional soldier. Lieutenant Walne served as a policeman in Sarawak after the war and says that he and Harrison were responsible for asking Sanderson to return during Confrontation. He provided original correspondence written during Semut dated August and September 1945. Lieutenant Alex Hawkins,⁷⁸ another Semut IV operative, wrote favourably of the assistance provided by Mr Harry Buxton, a Eurasian from Mukah who helped to break down the barriers in encountering Ibans for the first time. The coastal country in which they operated was prone to flooding and tidal fluctuations, which sorely tested their special operations skills.

Sergeant Fred Sanderson,⁷⁹ Semut I, was a very brave soldier and scornful of anyone who embellished accounts of their actions. Even he felt fear building up as they left Australia. 'Departing from Leyburn at 3 am on a blind date with fate in Japanese-occupied Borneo with a one way ticket was grim....Nervous pressure built up, but managed to control myself like the others.' After two aborted attempts to parachute in 'I was highly tensed up by now. We made it on the third. Signal light went on. We filed at (the) chute. My nerve was on top pitch. We were now 1000 feet above Long House D.Z. It would take 40 seconds or less to touch down. We would then know our fate, captured and killed by Japs, or be alive with friendly natives. We landed safely. Thank god.' Unluckily for one of the planes flown by Squadron Leader Graham Pockley, it crashed in the South China Sea on the way back to Moratai. Sanderson was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and with often only one other operative, he led a battalion size guerrilla force. He wrote 'It was about late April Major Harrison instructed me to recruit guerrillas at Ba Kelalan, while I had nothing to do at that time. That period was short lived. Training was practically nil, no rifle firing. We were short of arms right from the start and supplies were seldom after Major Carter dropped in April. In fact we were short of supplies, especially my party on the Limbang. We had 500 Ibans and only approximately 25 assortment of firearms. I managed to get some from 17th Brigade 9th Div at Limbang. I scored a few phosphorus grenades from the same avenue.'

Sergeant Frank Wigzell also operated in the Limbang Valley from early July to late September 1945.⁸⁰ His experience was of a smaller number of guerrillas. In the first operation they had about 100 guerrillas and only 25 weapons. In a subsequent operation the number of weapons had increased to 100, but the total number of guerrillas only amounted to 150. He argues that the total number of Iban families, approximately 64 between four Kampung, could not support a 500-man force. The fact that operatives recall shared experiences in different ways attests to the stresses and strains under which they operated.

Sir John Holland comments favourably on the qualities of the operatives, 'in spite of the fact that many of them had not had any field experience in the jungle. Indeed, some of them had not only never been shot at but had never even fired a shot in anger. But technically they were well trained and exhibited remarkable qualities of endurance and courage. The most glaring weakness in our training was in languages. We could have, and should have taken a more positive attitude to the training of our operatives.' In retrospect, Captain David Kearney, Semut III, considers that they were quite amateurish, 'however we did get away with it. There were significant losses among the Japs, none among the Australians, and we denied them economic activity in the area. A regular infantry battalion would have suffered far higher casualties, at least from disease and accident, and would have cost a hundred times more. Regular troops could not have survived in Borneo without considerable medical and other support services. That had been borne out in New Guinea. We on the other hand, carried our own medical repairs, carried our own food, and slept in long houses wherever we could find them. Our success, I felt, and still feel, was due to the cooperation of the Ibans, and second to the nature of the people attracted to this kind of work. For example, two lieutenants in my group at Fraser (Island), one white, the other an aborigine, had been in Singapore, had been told to march down to surrender, said fuck that, found a small boat and started rowing towards home. After some extraordinary events they were picked up and got home. The individual rather than a group or authoritative idea of "what had to be done" always seemed to distinguish the better Z people.⁸¹ While the experiences and recollections of all Semut operatives varied considerably, Sergeant Dennis Sheppard concludes

⁷⁸ Letter dated 4 November 1997.

⁷⁹ Letter of April 1997.

⁸⁰ Letter dated 8 November 1997.

⁸¹ Letter dated 12 November 1997.

⁸² Letter dated 28 December 1997.

that from an operative's perspective that 'It is inevitable that there will be a clash of personalities in all levels of army command from the platoon level to the division. In small units operating behind enemy lines the selection of all operatives apart from skills must also be based on their compatibility with one another.'⁸³



Dato Haji Mohamid Yassin Bin Haji Hashim (standing) and Mustapha (later Tun Mustapha, Chief minister of Sabah)

⁸³Letter dated 2 April 1997.

Guerrilla Perspectives

The experiences of the guerrillas who were still alive in 1997 are like a kaleidoscope of different actions. Although most were not certain of their exact ages, many almost all would have been very young as guerrillas, perhaps even teenagers. None had heard of the nickname Semut and it was not possible to find any artefacts, with the exception of a Japanese Ten-Yen note. Japanese helmets had been used to dehusk rice for many years after the war, but even these had been pounded into nothing. Most guerrillas said they walked a lot, but that they experienced very few engagements or skirmishes. Their training periods were very short, three days, perhaps two weeks at the most. Most recall hunger and fear. All expressed gratitude to their leaders, some very emotionally. Some were clearly too young to be scared, and incredible rapport with, and empathy for operatives still survives the passage of time. Some recalled the loss of their fellow guerrillas. Some returned to their kampungs or the jungle and did not know that the war was over for many years. Their employment varied from being Tom Harrisson's (the leader of Semut I) cookboy, to radio operator, rifleman, Bren gunners, porters, interpreters, ex-Japanese soldiers, airfield labourers and prisoner of war camp guards. Girls were sometimes used as decoys to allure Japanese. Accidental bombings by the air force were reported, but without rancour. Some guerrillas served again in Confrontation in the 1960s, and on opposite sides of the conflict. The Indonesian veterans I encountered thought all contacts in Confrontation were with Gurkhas. They did not appear to know of SAS. All are now receiving veteran entitlements, although the medal situation and pay was a variable point at the end of the war.

Of note were the reports of unilateral and independent raids by some tribes, including the use of about 100 former Japanese auxiliary troops. It is not possible to determine what knowledge Group A had of independent raids, for example by Ibans at Engkalili in Semut III's area. Professor Reece from Murdoch University advises that there were two unilateral raids by Ibans. The first was small. The second was large involving 100 men, and it is known as the Engalili Raid. Engalili is near Batang Ai and it was led by Penghulu Jimbun in Apr/May 1945. They were influenced by Allied planes and knowledge of white men in the interior. Had it not been for the support of the Penghulus in the first instance, the Semut operation would have failed. Warrant Officer Bob Long says that 'On most occasions Semut I operatives led native guerrilla parties, however there are documented cases of native led groups attacking the Japanese, mostly with success. Javanese troops, not sure how they were used but 25 finished up at Belawit in late September 1945 and were part of the column when Sergeant Roy Dawson and I made the trip from Belawit to Lawas.⁸⁴

The execution of prisoners of war remains a feature of guerrilla warfare, and former guerrillas openly talked it about when questioned, the taking of heads not being a big issue to the natives. The situations varied from the beheading of a Malay collaborator, albeit he was a PW and considered to be a British subject at the time, by Driver Henry's guerrillas without trial,⁸⁵ to unsubstantiated accounts of deliberate shootings. Later, Blamey's legal advisors found that the collaborator was 'shot while attempting to escape,' there is a fine line between civil affairs and guerrilla warfare. Major Harrisson submitted written evidence saying that 'My orders were, on the question of shooting collaborators or Japanese auxiliary troops, that the persons were to be sent back to me with evidence and witnesses.....owing to the exceptional conditions of service and remoteness from my immediate authority, any person must use their own discretion when exceeding my orders providing they were subsequently able to satisfy me that this was in the essential of their own immediate security.' It is unlikely that Group A or party leaders had any involvement with the execution of prisoners of war or knowledge of their fate. Certainly some operative's actions if captured were to take their cyanide pills, although not all operatives had the L capsule, so there could be little sympathy expected for their enemy. Sergeant Dennis Sheppard said that 'the very nature of river ambushes and the desire to leave no witnesses, the natives would make sure that no wounded Jap, that made the riverbank would survive'.

⁸⁴ Letters dated early 1997 and 24 October 1997.

⁸⁵ AWM 54, Written Records.

It is not possible to find out how pay was determined for guerrillas or indeed how decorations were awarded. This is supported by the absence of a listing of guerrilla's names in archives. It is true to say that very few of the guerrillas in Dutch Borneo received any pay or medals. This was obvious when I travelled through East Kalimantan in 1997. Those now living in East Malaysia had received pay and medals although there was no consistency in their distribution. Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh said that 'I paid my guerrillas fifty cents per day, when my three hundred dollars ran out I did not pay them, they stayed with me. I understand that Ah Toh's widow got thirty dollars.'⁸⁶ Lieutenant Rowan Waddy advises that Semut IV did not keep a list of guerrillas and simply left a note for a BBKAU Major to pay their Ibans for their excellent and loyal service. Sergeant Dennis Sheppard says that Semut II guerrillas, boatman and porters were paid 50 cents per day in Sarawak currency although he was aware of sovereigns being given as special rewards. Sergeant Fred Sanderson, Semut I, said that 'In my area the guerrillas were very poorly paid \$15 under 2 months service, \$20 over 3 months. They were also handed the old prickly woollen army blankets, which they refused. Even the Penghulus were treated shabbily. The rifles were withdrawn while Japs were still trickling through from Miri way.'⁸⁷ Warrant Officer Jack Tredrea said Harrison issued instructions as to amounts to be paid. 'Runners I paid 50 cents in Straits currency or half a Dutch Guilder for each trip of one per two days. Some runners were collecting at both ends of their trip and deserved it.'⁸⁸ Warrant Officer Col McPherson advised that 50 cents equated to the Private rate of pay in the pre-war Sarawak Rangers. It is also not possible to determine an accurate estimate of the ultimate strength of guerrilla forces. The official history states a total figure of about 2000. Semut II numbered between 30 and 40 at any one time, Semut III operatives claim about 450 and Semut IVb another 55 (about 23 Ibans, one Malay, one Chinese and about 20 Malay policeman). The numbers in Semut I are not known but by deduction could have been as many as 1500, of which 500 were in the Limbang and Padas River valleys. Clearly it was the largest organisation.

Bangau Gugang⁸⁹ was with Tuan George's⁹⁰ group and he was brought from Ba Kelalan valley to Long Beluyu as a porter. Upon reaching Long Beluyu he and two other men were ordered to go with a group to Sabah. For the detailed story in Sabah refer to the story told by Mr Dawat Sigar as he was also with him. According to Bangau he had a very interesting experience in Merapok. In his own words, once when they had a fierce fight with the Jap troops in Merapok, he was running out of bullets, so he had to find a way out from the fighting ground. By so doing he met with a Jap soldier, whom he guessed also had no more bullets. He charged after him. A few times the Jap soldiers aimed at him as he was chasing the Jap soldier; they but failed to open fire. He continued chasing him by swimming in the water under the 'Nipah' trees by the bank of the Lawas River some where in Merapok. At last he managed to get him by surprise and beheaded him. Sang Sigar (an interpreter) tried to ask him what gun he was using, but he told him that he wasn't sure of the gun, but that it was the usual type his friends were using. Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh comments that Bangau Gugang was indeed a 'member of my small party which I led against a small party of Japs in the mangroves at Merapok. We were up to our necks and waist in water, the distance between the two opposing groups was between approx 2 1/2 yards to 10 yards, the standard of shooting on both sides was appalling, so that to the best of my knowledge, the only two Japs killed by gun fire were from my carbine. The Japs were never renown for their accuracy, the headhunters even less so. Bangau states that he ran out of bullets. Every guerrilla was issued with ten rounds. I kept a small cache in reserve (the shortage was due to Harrison's incompetent logistics). Bangau (and the others) had a rough time. Ah Toh and I had to scream to cease-fire then we attacked the Japs with our parangs. It was a hideous experience for all of us who were involved (more so for the poor Japs I suppose). That plus a few other incidents in Libya, Greece and Crete left me with a legacy of nightmares for many years. That Bangau remembers so vividly his experiences in that incident touches me.'⁹¹

Bala-Palaba⁹² was eleven years old when the Japs first arrived at Pa Umor about one and a half hours walking from Bario. He initially cooked for the Javanese and Manado (Celebes) soldiers at Bario. The Manado soldiers

⁸⁶ Letter dated 17 April 1997.

⁸⁷ Letter dated April 1997.

⁸⁸ Letter dated 18 March 1997.

⁸⁹ Personal account of Bangau Gugang as told to Sang Sigar at Ba Kelalan in 1997.

⁹⁰ Tuan George was pronounced Tuan Yud by the natives.

⁹¹ Letter dated 26 November 1997.

⁹² Personal account of Bala-Palaba as told to Jim Truscott in December 1996.

changed sides and fought for Semut. He then cooked for Tom Harrisson at Bario until the end of the war. He recalls the burnt earth policy at the very end as the Japs headed towards Ba Kelalan. He also remembers Sergeant Sandy (Sanderson) well, but he was not a big fan of Harrisson. Harrisson reopened the school and was a tough man. He got to know him again during Confrontation and on the Brunei rebellion. Sanderson also returned to Bario for about six months as allegedly Harrisson asked him to return. He thought that there were about fifty Kelabit guerrillas in Semut. He later became an Inspector in the Sarawak Field Force and was the Commander of the Border Scouts from 1962 to 1966.

Datuk Racha Umong⁹³ was at least 31 years old when Sergeant Fred Sanderson recruited him. At the time he lived in Long Semadoh. He joined Semut when Sanderson arrived in Long Beluyu from Ba Kelalan. Racha and his group joined Sanderson enroute to Limbang via Madihit, carrying ammunition and guns. Racha carried a Bren gun. On a return trip to Limbang, he together with two Kelabits and another Lun Bawang, while travelling by boat, were ambushed by the Japs below (down river) from Long Madihit. He and the two Kelabits survived the ambush but Udan Sia, the other Lun Bawang, was killed. The same Japanese troops then marched to Ba Kelalan where they eventually surrendered. Racha Umong became involved in politics in 1982, when he was nominated as the State Assemblyman for Lawas. He was made 'Datuk' in 1988 when he retired.

Tua Labung⁹⁴ was born on 3 March 1919 and he served from 1943 to 1947 according to a British Army Discharge Card. He was awarded the Pacific Star and the Commonwealth Medal but both have been lost over time. Major Tom Harrisson recruited him and he worked with Tuan Alan, Tuan Sandy and Tuan Ric. His training was carried out by Alan and Sandy using arms couriered in by Kelabits from Bario. All the men were asked to join Semut, with some men being sent into Kalimantan with the women and children. There were ten men from Ba Kelalan who were active guerrillas. Tua carried a .303 rifle and he was introduced to the Sten, Austen and Bren gun. He had about two weeks training then on the job experiential training. His initial task under Harrisson was to attack huts at Long Semado with ten guerrillas but there were too many Japs. A second ambush was set at Long Melalem near Long Semado against Japs coming up from the Adang/Limbang area and Lawas to meet and join forces. It was decided that the Jap forces were too large for the Semut party to handle and the party withdrew and waited to place a third ambush at Ulu Gura where most of the Japanese (20 to 30) were killed. No heads were taken during this operation but many Jap weapons were taken back to Harrisson. He witnessed the Japanese surrender at Ba Kelalan and then was on escort duties from Ba Kelalan to Belawit. He also escorted Jap officers and other PW to Lawas. He remembers rations and fuel as being irregularly supplied by Harrisson. He was often hungry but always had high morale. Tua Labung lives at Long Kumap, four days walk from Ba Kelalan. Tua expressed his best wishes to Z people and welcomes any to Ba Kelalan. He was trying to get certificates of service for Semut guerrillas as the Malaysian Government was helping to form an ex-services organisation so that medical help and land grants could be awarded to proven members.

Isaac Udan Rangat⁹⁵ from Long Tuma near Lawas was 21 years old and teaching at Pa Berayong when he was recruited by Captain Ric Edmeades. He then worked as an interpreter around Bario and Long Semado. He related easily to the Tuans, sharing a feeling of wishing to overturn the Japs. He subsequently studied theology in Melbourne from 1959 until 1962. He had three medals, but he has lost them.

Lawrence Pagag Agong⁹⁶ from Long Tuma was 20 years old and he did a lot of walking when he was taken as forced labour by the Japanese to Miri and other places in 1941. He escaped in 1943 with three men. He met Captain Ric Edmeades in Lawas and he was sent to Bario. He spoke strongly of his dislike of the Japanese forcing them to work, and threatening families. He said that the Japanese killed families and heavily punished minor mistakes. He fought a battle at Long Lotok near Long Sukang with Captain Ric Edmeades, and proudly displayed his 1939-45 Medal, his Pacific Star and his Kings Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom. He fought again during Confrontation in the Fieldforce near Lawas.

⁹³ From an interview he completed with Sampson Bala-Palaba at Miri on 14 March 1997.

⁹⁴ From an interview he completed with Major Bruce O'Connor at Ba Kelalan on 21 January 1997.

⁹⁵ Interview at Lawas on 24 December 1996.

⁹⁶ Interview at Lawas on 24 December 1996.

Pirit Magil⁹⁷ from Long Tuma was 24 years old and a farmer when he received the call to help the white men at Pa Berayong. He was at the ambush at Long Lotok and also at Long Pa Sia where he was a sentry and fired on the Japs with his Lee Enfield. He worked with Tuan Mac (Warrant Officer MacPherson) for a month and he wanted him to know that he was still alive.

Kaya Anak Dumba was an Iban born in 1925. He lived at Rumah Kaya at Tanah Merah near Nanga Medamit. He told his story to his grandson, Ramlee Anak Usoh who sent it in Malay by letter to me after I had returned to Australia. The Allied forces arrived using aircraft and parachutes into the interior of Borneo at a place called Bario in the IVth Division (Miri). From there they split and went to the main rivers in Borneo such as the Baram,

Limbang, Medalam and Mentawai Rivers to oppose the Japanese. None of us knew about the arrival of the white men. Two of them who were conducting the operation Semut I in the Limbang area were Tuan Sandy (Sgt Sanderson) and Tuan Phil (pronounced Tuan Pill by the natives - Driver Henry). When they came to the Kelabit kampung up the Madihit and Limbang Rivers, Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil sent letters to the kampung people and the longhouse headman informing them that 2000 white soldiers were descending to the mouth of the Limbang River to fight the Japanese. But actually Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil were the only ones fighting the Japs along the Limbang River. Then they both descended the Limbang River by boat to Rumah Kedu in Nanga Meruyu where the headmen and villagers agreed they would oppose the Japanese together. Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil would train them in weapons that would be brought in by aircraft. In the meeting at Rumah Kedu the villager and the headmen of the longhouses agreed to fight a guerrilla war using Tuan Sandy's and Phil's tactics. Apart from that the villagers and the headmen gave information on the location and numbers of Japs in their areas. We advised Sandy that there were four at Rumah Penghulu Ngang and five at Nanga Medamit. These Japs had come about three weeks before them. Tuan Sandy instructed that the Japs should be capture alive. They were not allowed to be killed because we needed information from them about the location and numbers of their forces in the upper Limbang. Apart from that, I, Jimbai Anak Panggau (now deceased) and Baroak (Kelabit, and now deceased) were ready to fight the Japs. The three of us tricked and captured four Japs and one was captured by Nyua Anak Bana from Rumah Gani, Sepanggah, Medamit Limbang. After they were captured Tuan Sandy asked them the location and numbers of other Japanese in the Limbang area. After we got the information from them, Tuan Sandy shot them in front of the villagers at Nanga Medamit. Then Tuan Sandy ordered us to return the Jap's heads to Salai. After this about 30 of us with Tuan Sandy descended along the Limbang River to Ukong with Tuan Phil with the aim of attacking the Japs led by Mr Mesuda. When we reached Ukong, Mesuda had escaped because he knew we were coming with Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil.⁹⁸ We then continued to Kampung Luagan Induk and we captured one Jap and shot one Jap. From Kampung Induk we walked to Kampung Pangkalan Madang where we fought again. One of us was killed and we failed to capture or kill any Japs as we had to run away. From Kampung Madang we went back up the Limbang and Medalam Rivers as we were informed that Japs were coming down the Mentawai and Medalam Rivers. When they arrived at Mentakong our force led by Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil waited their arrival for two days when we were informed by Tr. Damu at Ulu Medalam that the Japs were entering their longhouses asking for food and to stay overnight. Because they lived in the longhouse we were not able to attack, as it would involve our own people. Tuan Sandy then ordered five people, Balan, Buda, Limping and Ujih to take a letter to the Japanese leader instructing them to surrender. When they arrived at the longhouse three of them were held and shot while Limping and Ujih escaped. After a long time they returned and Tuan Sandy ordered us to head upstream by boat. When we arrived at Ng Mentakong, Tuan Sandy ordered three people to walk on the right side of the river while Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil walked on the left side. The rest us went by boat. We were ambushed by Japs who were waiting our arrival. I still remember Tuan Sandy being surprised by being shot in the hat and falling into the river. When Tuan Sandy got out of the river he set up the machine gun and returned fire. Our troops on the right and in the boats continued to return fire. Jimbai Anak Panggau was shot in the hand. We fought from eight o'clock until eleven in the morning until we were forced to withdraw to Kuala Medalam. Two people, Ujih and Limping advised that the Japs headed to Nanga Anai up the Limbang River from Ulu that we continued downstream to Nanga Anai and arrived in the evening. We found that Japs had arrived before us at midday. We attacked them in

⁹⁷ Interview at Lawas on 24 December 1996.

⁹⁸ Driver Henry advises that he had been withdrawn by that stage and that Kaya Anak Dumba is probably referring to Sergeant Frank Wigzell. Letter dated 23 Oct 97.

early morning and we killed one and captured two wounded Japanese females. We returned by boat from Nanga Anai downstream to Tanah Merah where an allied ship was waiting. The prisoners were put on the ship and Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil returned to Pasar Limbang and Brunei where the Allies had already landed. The remaining Japs in the jungle either died of starvation or were killed by the villagers when they came looking to steal food. Sometime after that, Ln Laboi and Piau arrived advising us that the Japanese were in Kampung Limau Manis in Brunei. They were angered by Japanese cruelty. We descended the Limbang to face the Japs without the leadership of Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil. When we arrived at Limau Manis we landed and walked to Lemunin in Brunei but we found that there were no more Japanese in the area. During the walk to Brunei we met with white troops who were building a camp. We walked with these troops to Bandar Brunei and we were received well. We were given food and we exchanged weapons such as swords and rifles and clothing with Ibans. After several days in Brunei we were returned to Limbang by boat by the white troops. When we arrived the villagers came to Pasar Limbang to wait for us. We were advised that Japs were still up the Nauran River at Limbang and that only two white people were facing 30 Japs. One white man was shot in the arm. When we heard the shooting continue other white troops came to help. They killed eight Japs and the rest ran away up the Temburung River. During their escape they were ambushed by villages from Lubai and Pandaruan causing the death of Penghulu Wee (the head Iban). Some Japs were killed and the rest escaped into the forest. This is a true story passed on by myself. I am very old at 72 years of age and would like to meet with Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil if they are still alive. If they have money I will meet them when they come to my village in Limbang. If they are still alive and unable to come to my house I ask that they send me a photo. I still remember the time Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil shot a Helang bird, which was so high and so far away. After the war the Allies airdropped letters instructing the Japs in the jungle to surrender. The sad thing is that the Council took weapons such as rifles and samurai swords that we had captured. We were only paid five dollars each and it was not the same value as the items. My nephew cannot see what I struggled for with Tuan Sandy and Tuan Phil.'

The following story of Sengir Mere's⁹⁹ was told and written by his son Yonatan Sengir in a letter from Long Bawan just before I returned to Australia. 'The war that came to the Belawit area of Borneo along the border between Indonesia and Malaysia was called the Japanese occupation at the time. At that time the Government of the Dutch Indies had surrendered to Japan. Because the Japs were in domination, they moved from place to place until they arrived at Belawit. While the Japanese were at Belawit they acted as they wanted and the people opposed them several times. During this struggle there were many victims on the Belawit and Japanese sides. Not long during that time there arrived Australians from Operation Semut. They were under Major Tom Harrisson and they had first come to Bario in Malaysia. Then they landed in Belawit by parachute. After arriving they established themselves in Belawit. Harrisson instructed the Belawit people to construct an airstrip that would be used to bring in assistance such as rations and medicine and other instruments of war that was needed at the time. During that time Harrisson was located in Belawit and from there he could supervise other areas such as Bario and Ba Kelalan and environs. During that time that he worked from Belawit, Harrisson met with Sengir Mere who was tribal head. Harrisson appointed Sengir Mere as adjutant, supervisor of the Belawit peoples forces, supervisor of the drug Store and the armoury and the paymaster for labourers and also supervisor of the airfield. With Sengir Mere's appointment as the assistant to Major Harrisson they formed the peoples forces that joined in the war against Japan. The people and the youth of Belawit that joined numbered about 100. They were all under the leadership of Major Harrisson, Sengir Mere and others. The equipment used at the time was simple such as sword, blowpipe, spear, sharpened bamboo and other equipment provided by Harrisson such as five carbines, five Lee Enfields, 100 Brens and 30 Stens. With these minimal and simple weapons they were able to attack and oppose Japanese with spirit and resolve. Under the leadership of Major Tom Harrisson and his comrades, the Japanese were defeated and they retreated from the Belawit area. As a result of the end of the struggle, Major Harrisson gave a medal and a token of appreciation to Sengir Mere in the form of a star of Operation Semut and the medal of the Australian war. Also weapons, samurai swords and others as an expression of appreciation for service and assistance that he provided in the conduct of his duties in the assistance of Harrisson until the victory and liberation of the nation. To conclude this brief history, we made a book of this period and Harrisson gave a copy to Sengir Mere. There are

⁹⁹ Letter dated 14 February 1997.

photos of the Belawit people's traditional clothing complete with a story of their struggle. One of these books is in the Kuching Museum. This brief history is at your request when you came to Belawit to see for yourself.'

Samual Ubung's¹⁰⁰ story. 'This brief history has been compiled and written by myself in accordance with my own experiences during WWII. Before I continue with this story I would first like to ask forgiveness for any omissions and any inaccuracies and I extend apologies to readers. First of all, about Major Tom Harrisson's troops that came to Sarawak by plane and parachute to Bario. Because Bario did not have an airstrip, the British forces had to come down by parachute in order to oppose the Japs. They were pioneer troops into the interior including the Krayan district itself. After the British troops had been in the Bario area for several days, Major Harrisson ordered them to depart for Lembudut, that is my village. Once the troops arrived in Lembudut they immediately contacted Bario by telegram. Shortly afterwards Major Harrisson arrived in Lembudut, after the troops had been there for one day living in the locals houses. Once he arrived the troops moved and constructed a command post in the jungle not too far away from the village. This post was constructed with the assistance of the locals. Major Harrisson gathered all the villagers to a meeting and a discussion to construct an airstrip in the area. This program did not eventuate because the locals were worried because of the war. While poor Major Harrisson was busy searching for a place to build the airstrip, equipment, supplies and medicine were dropped by parachute. While the drop was taking place at Lembudut, Major Harrisson went to Belawit to talk to locals there because that area had land and a location, which could be used. They agreed and the name of this area was changed to become Berian Baru. It is located about one and a half hours walk from Lembudut. While working on the airstrip supervised by Major Harrisson's troops, they often returned to their defensive post at Lembudut to await the completion of the airstrip. During the airdrop of equipment and other required items the type of weapons dropped were Carbine, Sten, rifle, Lee Enfield and 12 gauge. These five types of weapons were used to oppose the Japs. Some of those weapons were taken to Long Tua part of Bahau Kecamatan Pujungan. Locals including myself carried the weapons there. When Major Harrisson gave me a 12-gauge weapon I was given three rounds only. On that day I also walked to a hut in the forest and I caught a monkey and a pig. Because the animals were so big I was forced to carry these two animals myself to my house. When I arrived at my house two of the animals I carried to Major Harrisson's post, and the weapon as well. Because he did not want my weapon returned, I was given ten more rounds every time I brought more animals to him, after which I was given the weapon as a gift. Because Harrisson's troops had lived in the area for a while and because the airstrip was finished, aircraft began to arrive and land. All troops moved to Belawit and they then asked for assistance from the locals to become a voluntary force. I became a voluntary soldier with many others who were asked. There were many reasons why others did not come. During my service I was given a Lee Enfield, a days training on how to shoot, to strip and assemble and hold the weapon. The following day we were ordered to depart for Ba Kelalan where the Japanese had arrived at Long Malalam, which is not far from Ba Kelalan, one day and one night. The next day we departed Ba Kelalan for Long Beluyu. We stayed at Long Belyuyu for four days. While we stayed there several of our members went to spy on the Japanese at Long Malalam. We heard stories and information previously before we infiltrated the Japanese already in the Long Malalam village. During the two days that I was in Long Beluyu my feet were injured by my own parang while we were getting wood. and my wound was bad. Because the Japanese were getting closer to our troops at Long Beluyu my commander Tuan Sandy was concerned with my welfare. I was carried by three of our troops, Tangut Udan, Panai Pirit and Padan Dai to Ba Kelalan. After we arrived at Ba Kelalan the three of them returned to their place of duty at Long Beluyu. I then walked by myself to my village in Lembudut and stayed there for two days. I was not very calm thinking about my friends waiting for the Japanese attack from Long Belalam. I returned although my legs had not healed properly yet. When I arrived in Ba Kelalan all our troops had retreated there because the Japanese had taken one of the higher tracks that had led to Ba Kelalan. All our troops were ordered to dig in to defend against the Japs. During that time two of my friends were ordered to spy on the Japanese once they had arrived in Long Pala not far from our position. The three of us returned bringing news about them. We were not back long when the Japanese arrived followed by an attack and violent fight. There was a big chance that many Japanese fell victims as the Japanese did not return fire.

¹⁰⁰ Told by Samual Ubung to, and written by Musa Asan at Lembudut on 12 March 1997.

During the day we attacked the Japanese. At about five in the afternoon our troops fell back to Long Langai to dig in for the second time. The next day two Japanese appeared heading towards our positions. We shot them. Later that day the Japanese attacked causing two casualties, Yupai from Tang Paye and Seminar from Baalan. During that night when our troops were attacked we fell back to Ba Kelalan where we stayed for a while. The next morning all of us returned to our villages. After two days there was news that the Japanese had surrendered. This was broadcasted to all of our troops and we were instructed to immediately meet and return our weapons to Belawit or Liang Bua. My experience was during my 20s and I was not married and I did not own a house. At the time when I became a volunteer, my parents and their house were not looked after, as I was busy being ordered around the place. I thank God that I was able to carry out my duties safely. At the arrival of the British troops to my area there are several which I still remember. They are Major Harrisson, Tuan Obat, Tuan Deen, Tuan Long, Tuan Sandy, Tuan Bower, Tuan Alan, Tuan Ric, Tuan Doc, Tuan Carter, Tuan Tusun, Tuan Cusack, Tuan Smith, Tuan Bulang (Manado) and other names that I cannot remember.'

Agan Abai¹⁰¹ (Ngelawan Rapa) who is now 75 years old, came from Kubaan. He was involved with the capture of sixteen Japs at Kuala Madihit, and no white men were present. He then helped bring these prisoners back to Bario before taking them to Labuan via Lawas. He also went to and from Long Lellang many times carrying very heavy loads on the five-day journey. After the war he accompanied Harrisson to Batu Lawi.¹⁰² Unfortunately he has since lost both of his medals. His wife's father was also a guerrilla.

Temmengong Koh Anak Jubang¹⁰³ was born about 1870 and he died in 1956. Koh organised a meeting of all Penghulu in Kapit before reporting back to the Semut operatives at Pasir Nai that they would support Semut. Koh directed the air attack on Song, when five planes landed at Kapit and picked up Major Sochon and Koh to direct the bombing. He also prevented many Chinese and Malays from being killed by Ibans. In another instance, the people wanted to kill a Singh but he surrendered to Koh who then intervened. The Singh later on became a policeman in Song. After the war, the Rajah called Koh to Kuching to tell him that he wanted to stand down due to debt and that he wanted to give Sarawak back to the King. Koh accepted the explanation. Koh's son recalls his father speaking about the forced labour used to build airfields at Sibu and Bintulu. He commented that although the cutting off of heads was outlawed in 1924, the Ibans still saw it as 'sport' during the war. Koh received the Pacific Star and Kings Medal for Chiefs (KMC) for his war and post war service.

Siangkul Bin Biagan¹⁰⁴ was 23 years old in 1945. He met Tuan Cusack (Warrant Officer Cusack) and Tuan Des at Lumbis where he was trained on the Lee Enfield. He was not involved in any battles, as the Japs had already run away. He accompanied Tuan Cusack to Malinau and Tarakan. After the war he became a police sergeant, Ketua Kampung then a Datuk.

Anangau Bin Anamangat¹⁰⁵ was 14 years old in 1945. He was summonsed to Lumbis to meet Tuan Cusack in Lumbis. He and his father shot ten Japs near Sigatal during a co-ordinated air attack. The rest of the Japanese ran away to Keningau. He then returned to Lumbis and peace.

Tulamus Bin Mungkiou¹⁰⁶ was 22 years old in 1945. He was with Anangau Bin Anamangat. He also recalls Tuan Cusack accidentally shot at five locals who were accompanying some Japs in a boat. The Japs swam down river and they were not killed.

Malauyang Bin Languan¹⁰⁷ carried a Lee Enfield and met Tuan Cusack at Lumbis where he also trained. He then fought for two months killing two Japs at Long Lobang and two Japs at Pensiangan (Long Lalung). On his third

¹⁰¹ Interview in the markets at Miri on 13 February 1997.

¹⁰² The fish tail mountain at the head of the Limbang Valley.

¹⁰³ Interview with Koh's son at Kuching on 12 February 1997. He maintains a transcript in Iban of his father's wartime experiences. Vinson Sutlive, the biographer of Tun Jugah is writing a biography on Koh.

¹⁰⁴ Interview at Silungai, Sabah on 5 February 1997.

¹⁰⁵ Interview at Silungai, Sabah on 5 February 1997.

¹⁰⁶ Interview at Silungai, Sabah on 5 February 1997.

¹⁰⁷ Interview at Lumbis on 3 February 1997.

time at Pensiangan he killed seven Japs, spending two weeks in the area. There were sixty people in his group and he constantly felt hungry. He said that Tuan Cusack did not allow heads to be cut off.

Pak Yambirau¹⁰⁸ from Desa Tau at Lumbis was about 13 years old in 1945. He was trained on a carbine at Long Berang before returning with Tuan Cusack to Lumbis. There were no Japs there, so he returned to Long Bawan via Wai Agong. He also trained as a radio operator as he had gone to school. He then returned to Lumbis and Pensiangan where they fought for one day, killing 64 Japanese. They then returned to Lumbis and peace.

Dumuso and Taluki¹⁰⁹ were both about 18 years old and carried Lee Enfields in 1945. Dumuso came from Long Labang and Taluki came from ulu Lumbis. Tuan Cusack recruited them and then 30 to 40 of them walked back to Belawit to be trained for about a week before returning to Lumbis (via Wai Agong) with Cusack. They were in the party with Cusack which shot two Japs at Long Labang. They remember the air raids, which were coordinated with their attacks on the Japanese near Pensiangan over a two-day period. They finally returned to Lumbis and did not receive any medals.

D. Lagan Lalung¹¹⁰ from Pelita Kanaan near Malinau was still at school in Malinau when WWII started. He saw an allied plane shot down by the Japanese at Long Kesurun near Long Berang and all five crew were killed. When the Allies bombed Malinau all the Japanese ran away. Five crew jumped from another plane near Mentarang near Long Berang, two were lost and the headman rescued the other three. Harrisson ordered these three to be brought to Belawit. There Harrisson gave guns to about fifty natives from Long Berang, he carried a Sten. He then went onto Long Semado, Long Pasia, Eburu where there were two Japanese prostitutes. When he returned to Belawit he saw 200 Japanese surrendering to Harrisson, and then he was told to return home. He said that Harrisson gave out 57 medals and he got one of them.

Sakai Pengeran¹¹¹ from Desa Tanjung Lopang was about 22 years old and carried a Bren gun in 1945. He was a teacher before the war. He met Tuan Cusack at Long Berang where they were given weapons. He then went to Kampung Labang near Lumbis for three days, but there was no one there so they tried to get food from an empty padi. There were 50 guerrillas in their party and they then attacked and killed over 20 Japanese on a hit and run raid. They walked for one day to the border, before being ordered to Bantul in the ulu north of Lobang, where there were many Japs. His brother Foret from Long Berang replaced him, as his wife was sick. Harrisson come to Long Berang in 1946 and gave him a medal with a mouse on it. He lost this medal during Confrontation.

Robin Ating¹¹² was about 18 years old and carried a parang in 1945. He was initially forced to join the Japanese Army, but then he became a guerrilla at Belawit and fought at Ba Kelalan.

Padam Liang and Daud Lalung¹¹³ were both about 12 years old and were armed with Lee Enfields. They both came from Long Api. Their guerrilla group was lead by Swalayan (probably Corporal Sualang, ex-NEI Army), a Manado from Macassar, who had run away from the Japanese army in Sarawak. He met and trained with Semut at Belawit. They went to a place called Batu Bating beside the river at Long Beluyu, then Ba Kelalan (Long Talal Buda) for two days, then Long Longai where two guerrillas were shot by Japs before returning to Belawit. It was a running battle from Long Beluyu to Long Longai. Over 100 Japs were killed at Long Beluyu and their bodies were thrown into the forest and the river. One of them brought a Japanese head home from Ba Kelalan to his mother at Belawit. They watched the Japanese surrender when they were taken to Belawit. He remembers Harrisson, Tuan Long, Tuan Ric, three Dutch army instructors, Tuan Jack, Tuan Jeff, Tuan Hardy and Tuan Doc.

¹⁰⁸ Interview at Lumbis on 3 February 1997.

¹⁰⁹ Interview at Long Labang on 2 February 1997.

¹¹⁰ Interview at Malinau on 29 January 1997.

¹¹¹ Interview at Malinau on 29 January 1997.

¹¹² Interview at Long Bawan on 29 January 1997.

¹¹³ Interview at Long Bawan on 29 January 1997.

Both men accompanied Jack Tredrea to Long Nawang and Lumbis, with Sere Rukume who is now deceased. Both men helped to build the Belawit airfield. They were glad that Semut happened as they were sick of being in the jungle without food.

Surang Iteb¹¹⁴ from Long Midang (formally Pak Nado) were armed with a Lee Enfield in 1945. He walked from Pak Nado to Ba Kelalan and fought there for two weeks. He killed four Japs himself and saw two Japs carrying a white flag to Harrisson asking to surrender. He escorted 100 Japs to a PW camp at Long Midang, and after two weeks these Japs were walked to Lawas. Their Samurai swords were stored in the church at Long Midang.

Liang Besar¹¹⁵ from Desa Liang Tuer beside Long Midang worked as a farmer in support of Semut at Long Midang.

Yudan Tele¹¹⁶ from Desa Pa Rupay was armed with a Lee Enfield. Five men at Long Tua had killed a Dutchman by the name of Adin, and Harrisson told Yudan to bring Adin's killers back in handcuffs. It took them a week to bring them to Bario. He then worked as a prison guard at Long Midang.

Yakub Ribun¹¹⁷ from Desa Pak Kidaing were armed with a Lee Enfield. He went with Tuan Ric to Long Semado and Long Beluyu. They attacked the Japs there, then withdrew to Ba Kelalan where he killed 20 Japs. His father, Yupai Uket was also a guerrilla, and the Japanese at Ba Kelalan killed him. After one week at Ba Kelalan, there was peace and he returned home.

Yustim Tebary¹¹⁸ from Pak Kalipal originally came from Long Berang in WWII. Yudan Sibal was armed with Lee Enfield and came from Pak Putuk at Long Bawan. They walked from Belawit to Long Bawan to Long Berang to Lumbis and return. They were involved in a river ambush at Long Berang where ten Japanese and one guerrilla, Udan were killed. They were scared and happy at the same time, and did not receive any medals.

Surang Iteb¹¹⁹ from Long Medang was armed with a Lee Enfield. He fought at Ba Kelalan where two Japs were killed and remembers Tuan Bob (Warrant Officer Bob Long). He also accompanied Major Harrisson and Tuan Ric (Captain Edmeades) to Lawas. He walked many times between Bario and Belawit as a porter, carrying food. He didn't receive any medals.

Basar Pengiran¹²⁰ from Long Umung, formally known as Long Nuat was armed with a Sten. He was 18 years old in 1945 and never met any Japanese. He spent two weeks at Long Bawan and one week at Long Nuat where he used a Lee Enfield on the range.

Mutang Pengiran¹²¹ from Wai Agung spent two months looking for Japs but never saw any. He spent one of these months at Lumbis. He also walked to Eburu and Meligan.

Tangut Udan¹²² from Lembudut is about 80 years old. He used a Lee Enfield and remembers Tuan Sandy. He fought at Long Beluyu where many Japanese were killed and all of their heads were cut off.

¹¹⁴ Interview at Long Bawan on 28 January 1997

¹¹⁵ Interview at Long Bawan on 28 January 1997

¹¹⁶ Interview at Long Bawan on 28 January 1997

¹¹⁷ Interview at Long Bawan on 21 January 1997

¹¹⁸ Interview at Long Bawan on 21 January 1997

¹¹⁹ Interview at Long Bawan on 21 January 1997

¹²⁰ Interview at Long Bawan on 27 January 1997

¹²¹ Interview at Wai Agung on 27 January 1997

¹²² Interview at Lembudut on 21 January 1997

Bina Agung¹²³ was trained by Tuan Sandy and Tuan Cusack, on the Lee Enfield, Sten and Bren gun. He cut off four heads at Ba Kelalan. He also fought as a Section Commander at Melligan where a lot of prisoners were shot. Udan Dawar using a Sten, Paulus Hasut using a Lee Enfield and Melut Palung using a carbine, were with Bina Agung. All these men were wearing their Indonesian veteran's uniforms. All had fought again during Confrontation.

Dawat Sigar¹²⁴ was 18 years old in 1945. He was trained on the Carbine, Sterling, hand grenade and pistol. He was on the move all the time, generally in Sabah with Tuan George (Corporal Griffiths-Marsh). There were about 80 people in his group and he was the leader. He was in the Messapol ambush where they waited until six in the evening when the Japs started cooking. He did the reconnaissance and gave the signal shot. The Japs replied then stopped shooting. The Japs thought they had retreated, then the guerrillas started shooting, killing 16. All their heads were cut off. The rest of the Japs ran. Tuan George was elsewhere at the time. In another encounter Japs were reported coming by boat from Merapok. They waited day and night but the Japs didn't come. The Jap boat had capsized so the Japanese went with their Malay guides and surrendered to the guerrillas. They shot and beheaded them all and there was much fighting over the heads. Tuan George was with them. At Pensiangan, three guerrilla groups joined together and they fought the Japanese in small numbers. The Japanese had four ladies with them. Three were shot and 37 Japanese surrendered and were taken to Lawas by Tuan George. Palung Kaya who was 18 and used a Lee Enfield was in Dawat Sigar's group.

Padan Labo¹²⁵ used a Lee Enfield. He worked with Tuan Ric (Captain Edmeades) then a group led by Swalayan who used a machine gun and became a very famous man. He was involved in the battle at Long Beluyu with other guerrillas from Ba Kelalan. Three Japanese were killed at ulu Gura and there were no operatives with them. All groups then fought at Buduk Bui (Talal Buda) against a lot of Japs, until Swalayan gave the order to retreat to Long Langai. They waited for the Japs for hours then two came to pick beans (as it was harvest time) and they were shot. They waited until six in the evening when two locals went and chopped their heads off. Later that night they felt hungry and cooked a meal in a padi hut. Two Japs crawled in and shot Seminar Padan and Upai. One died on the spot and one crawled away while the guerrillas retreated. Most went into Dutch Borneo. Two days later the Japanese refused to surrender so a major from Labuan brought Japanese flags to Long Longai. The Japanese were reluctant to surrender and tried to shoot the flags. It took a day for their superiors to convince them to surrender. Then their weapons were gathered, burnt and thrown into the river. Some locals recovered the weapons and used them for hunting. Padan recalls that when they were learning to fight, the Europeans told them to stay on the ground and if they ran out of bullets to throw away the firing pin. Padan tells a story of Iban Yusup, a policeman, who was told by the Japanese that he was to report on the Europeans in Ba Kelalan. Instead he gave them the opposite information and he also guided the Europeans from Bario to Ba Kelalan. Padan recalls that when the Japanese arrived in Ba Kelalan, the padi was destroyed and the livestock killed as the Japs were starving. Houses were dismantled for firewood or burnt down. The Japs grounded padi in their helmets. The Japs were stationed in Ba Kelalan unlike other places where they just passed by. Padan also tells a story that the people in Lawas had to provide five gantengs of rice. The Penghulu of Ba Kelalan, Badan Paren told Harrisson and he organised for Lawas to be bombed in three days time.

Alla Bugang and Nyok Wee were two Penan guerrillas still living a traditional life in the small community of Long Raya.¹²⁶ They were overcome with emotion when they heard that Tuan Sandy was still alive (at that time).

Tai Bilong is the son of Jangin Tai Bilong from Long Sebayang.¹²⁷ The son said that his father had shot two Japs but that he didn't receive any medals. The son remembers 40 Japanese dying of hunger and being killed by their heads being cut off. They were eaten.

¹²³ Interview at Long Bawan on 21 January 1997.

¹²⁴ Interview at Ba Kelalan on 19 January 1997.

¹²⁵ Interview at Ba Kelalan on 19 January 1997.

¹²⁶ Interview at Long Kaya on 17 January 1997.

¹²⁷ Interview at Long Sebayang on 16 January 1997.

Awang the Penan Ketua from Long Tergan¹²⁸ was about 18 years old in 1945. He used a blowpipe but there was no fighting in his area. He remembers Tuan Sandy and Harrisson as strong men.

Agam Ibh¹²⁹ carried a Lee Enfield. He recalls Pun Umung and Taie Bilung shooting the Japanese leader in the Long Napir area. He says that the Japanese confiscated all their food and they had to live in the jungle with the Penan. He was involved in a large fight when the Japs arrived at Long Napir after Semut had arrived. Shotguns were used but there were no Kelabits killed. Many Japs were killed and only ten prisoners were taken to Belawit. They were given wheat in barrels after the war as aid, and they boiled it and ate it like porridge.

Lujok¹³⁰ tells a story of when he ran away from a reconnaissance, when the Japs who were in a house that they were under, heard them. As they ran away, the others trampled on top of him as they ran downhill.

Miri Pulu¹³¹ was 21 when the Japanese took him to Brunei. They were forced to work in Seria and were trained as soldiers before he returned to Limbang and fought for Tuan Sandy. He carried a Lee Enfield. He did not feel scared, as he was so young. He preferred shooting pigs as they stood up, the Japanese lay down, and pigs didn't shoot back at locals. No one trained them and their weapons were just left in a cache, which they lifted. He saw Tuan Sandy swim across a river just to kill Japs.

Roland Satu Ukab¹³² tells a story about his uncle, Pun Umung (Balan Deng). He gave a chicken to the Japs and asked them to surrender at the end of the war, which they did. Roland said that his uncle told another story about Balang Ribuh who was very old and could not run away after the Japs ate their rice and pigs. The Japs ate him. Ten Japanese prisoners told this to Umung as he took them to Ba Kelalan. Roland Satu Ukab said that his father Tamah Ukab (Marah Uga) did a two-man reconnaissance of some Japanese near Long Napir. He broke a twig and the Japs fired at them. They escaped by jumping in the river and swimming down the rapids. He left his weapon in the river rather than drown by carrying it. Tuan Phil (Henry) was involved in the action. After the war, the British wanted the local people to kill a Jap prisoner to get rid of him, and Tamah Ukab did it with a blowpipe. He said that about 30 people upstream of Kuala Medamit, never received medals.

Akun Pengiran¹³³ (Tanah Sian) was 21 when he was recruited to resist in the villages in the upper Limbang like Long Terasa near Long Napir. He was armed with a Lee Enfield. He was caught in some distant crossfire in the jungle. He saw about ten corpses a few days later and buried three in one grave. He remembers Tuan Sandy, Tuan Phil (Driver Henry) and Major Harrisson.

Tuai Rumah Kaya Tanah Merah was 18 when he had two fingers shot off by a Japanese weapon.

Ding Anyi from Long Pilah lost his right leg; Payah Ajang from Long Pilah lost his left hand and Jok Mering lost his right ear when they were wrongly strafed by the RAAF.¹³⁴ Sergeant Sheppard does not recall these woundings as 'the wounded natives brought to Long Akah after the long house was wrongly strafed including an old lady, a very young girl and one man with minor injuries, however he accepts their version of events.'¹³⁵

Ding Lah¹³⁶ at 23 years and Ding Emang at 28 years of age went into hiding at Long Kelamah (beside the Baram River) when a lower Kenyan tribe warned them that the Japs were going to attack the next day. At the longhouse at Long Laput, the headman offered a chicken to appease the Japs and find their locations near Long Lama.

¹²⁸ Interview at Long Tergan on 16 January 1997.

¹²⁹ Interview at Long Napir on 15 January 1997.

¹³⁰ Interview at Long Napir on 15 January 1997.

¹³¹ Interview at Long Napir on 15 January 1997.

¹³² Interview at Long Napir on 15 January 1997.

¹³³ Interview at Long Napir on 15 January 1997.

¹³⁴ Interview at Long Miri with Temmenggong Pahang Den Anyi on 13 January 1997.

¹³⁵ Letter dated late 1997.

¹³⁶ Interview at Long Miri on 13 January 1997.

The headman, Baya Lenjau subsequently informed Tuan Shep (Sergeant Shephard) and called a midnight meeting. Shep told them that they must lie down to fire the machine gun. During a contact, one Jap came from behind, but Baya saw him coming and shot him in the head. Shep had run out of ammunition. They then chopped the Jap to pieces and divided him up amongst the warriors. Some Chinese from Long Lama bazaar were hiding at Long Peluen so someone called Marudi to ask the Australians to bomb Long Lama, but the RAAF attacked Long Pilah instead. Two men and one woman were injured as a consequence. Both Ding Lah and Ding Emang used a blowpipe and spear. They only fought in the middle and upper Baram above Long Lama and were given no medals. They referred to Major Carter as 'King Carter'. They said that the people from Long Pilah hid for a year in the jungle once the Japs attacked. Tuan Shep only gave them one match head to survive, and they thank Shep for the match, salt and parachute silk that they used for clothing. They told a story where a Jap was barbecued, as the people were very angry. Tuan Shep refused to eat any. They told another story when little bits of a Jap's body were given out to many people. Tuan Shep must visit them. They cannot remember other operative names, but they still remember their faces. Sergeant Danny Sheppard has placed Ding Lah's story into the order in which the events occurred. 'After my para-drop at Long Akah the Liberator was contacted and requested to strafe the wireless station at Long Lama on the return trip back to base. Unfortunately the long house at Long Pilah was targeted and some natives wounded. Several days later the Penghulu from Long Pilah brought the wounded to Long Akah for treatment and to seek an explanation for the incident. I was ordered to accompany the chief back to Long Pilah, which is upstream from Long Lama to "show the flag" and keep faith in the event of a Japanese attack on the long house. Four or five days later Lieutenant Woods and Sergeant Phippen arrived on their way to the Tutoh River with orders for me to attack the Jap wireless station. I took the opportunity of additional firepower and expertise to attack at dawn the following day. The headman Baya Lenjau (I will accept the name) was sent by me during the day to reconnoitre the wireless station, assess numbers and locations etc. He was accepted by the Japanese as being a "friendly". We moved to Long Laput, the long house being closer to Long Lama for the attack. Some guerrillas, other than the Kenyans were instructed in the use of rifles etc. No native was ever allowed to fire the Bren, the instructions took place all night. During the attack a Jap emerged from the hut, was shot by Phippen, and subsequently hacked to pieces. Parts of his body were displayed at long houses up and down the Baram River. A Jap who escaped the attack on Long Lama was speared by the natives and brought to Long Akah where his wounds were treated. He was at a later date dispatched to Labuan by Catalina. I don't remember a Japanese being barbecued, but it makes for a good gruesome story.'¹³⁷

Muing Juman Ajang¹³⁸ from Long San fought with Tuan Shep near Long Lama. He remembers Carter and Harrison as well. He was 20 at the time and trained at Long Akah, where he saw the parachute jump. He used a parang only. He saw two Japs but they ran away. He remembers the Japs coming to Long Lama from Miri and was there when one of the white men shot a Jap. He was in the ambush near Marudi at three o'clock in the morning when they killed many Japanese in two large prahus, and no Kenyans were killed. He was also bombed by the Japanese causing the white men to run to Marudi. When many Australian barges (D Coy, 2/17 Bn AIF) and aircraft came up the river, the Japs ran back to Marudi again. Finally he recalls the Japs fleeing towards the Limbang and Tutoh Rivers. Three Kenyans were killed during this. He only received one round medal but has lost it. Carter gave all the guerrillas only one medal.

Tama Engan¹³⁹ was 34 years old in 1945 and came from Pa Lungan. He went to Indonesia and met Tuan Kusui at Brian Baru (Belawit) who told him that he had escaped from the Japanese and that some white men had landed at Bario. He then went back with the Pa Lungan people to Bario. The white men, including Tuan Harrison, Tuan Sandy and Tuan Obat stayed at Legu Rayal. Weapons were given out and everybody was trained with the rifle. They also went and trained at Belawit, shooting drum covers, working without pay. At Long Langai there was fighting with over 500 people involved. Two Lun Bawang died, Upai and Dawat Seminar. Tom Harrison arrived and brought two Japanese chiefs together to arrange a surrender, by putting a British flag and a Japanese flag on the ground at Long Longai. After their surrender, the Japanese were only allowed to wear trousers. Everything else was collected, and the Japs were then sent on foot to Long Bawan and onto Tarakan.

¹³⁷ Letter dated late 1997.

¹³⁸ Interview at Long San on 13 January 1997.

¹³⁹ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹³⁹ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

Paran Matu¹⁴⁰ was 34 years old and came from the ten-door longhouse at Pa Tik. He vividly recalled seven planes passing overhead and Japanese planes. When they heard that the Japanese were going from Long Terigun to Long Seridan, more than fifty guerrillas including himself, Budul, Bulang and Kusui were sent to Long Seridan with rifles. They met about 20 Japanese at Long Seridan. They bought a pig to feed everyone but the Japanese didn't want the food, suspecting that it was poisoned. At the start of his war, the rice was just about flowering. They went back to Bario but the Japanese didn't want to go, as they didn't believe that the war was over. The guerrillas returned to Bario and they met Agan Ulun on the way with a Japanese saying that they had already surrendered. Then the Japanese came back to Bario. Some of them went to Long Lellang. One was very sick and he was buried alive.

Liang Ipang¹⁴¹ was at Bario and watched Tom Harrison parachute down at nine o'clock in the morning. He recalls Harrison sending messages to the headman to come to Bario and asking if there were any Japanese in the area. After the meeting, Harrison sent four guerrillas with each operative to Long Akah, Limbang, Long Berang and Lawas. The next day, he and other porters subsequently accompanied eight people including Tuan Carter, Tuan Bower, Tuan Alan, Tuan West and Tuan Sochon to Kubaan. Bulang Kusui reported back to Harrison that they had made it to Long Lellang.

Tama Saging¹⁴² (Agan Ulun) was 24 years old in 1945. He said that Tom Harrison parachuted at Ulung Pallang. Harrison explained to them that the Japanese were on their way to attack them, and he invited everyone to Bario. They then set about training them on weapons for three days. He remembers Major Carter going off to Kubaan with four other white men, enroute to Long Lellang, carrying Bren guns onto Long San. There was a major fight at Pa Tutoh when the Japanese moved through on their way to the Limbang. Two to three hundred Japs went onto Ba Kelalan, Long Bawan and eventually walked all the way to Tarakan. After going to Long Lellang, he and Belore carried 400 bullets to Long Seridan, a ulu Limbang community, where the Japanese had invaded their longhouse. Twenty Japanese were caught there at Rumah Ringat and brought back to Bario, before being moved onto Tarakan. One Jap died and was buried at Long Buyo.

Perait Mangang¹⁴³ (Lama Nirim) was 23 years old in 1945. He was trained to shoot in a clearing in the jungle. He heard that Japanese were at Long Seridan and following the route to Kubaan. He received a message from Rapat that the Japanese had surrendered at Bario. He saw ten naked Japanese there, standing in the rain. After clothing them, they were sent to Belawit.

Tama Ruth and Robertson Bala¹⁴⁴ are the sons of Dita Bala. Dita Bala received three medals, including one for bravery. Robertson Bala fought as a Corporal for British SAS from 1965 to 1968 as an interpreter and fighter. He received the highly unusual recognition of being allowed to carry a M16 rifle on a four man, three month British SAS patrol to reconnoitre Long Tua along the Indonesian border.

Moran Roito¹⁴⁵ was 19 years old and came from Pa Mada. About 30 of them were recruited by Tom Harrison from Pun Besara. Then they were accommodated at Bario and a campsite/hiding place known as Tanah Rengung. He spent half a year at Belawit making the airfield and taking rations off the Auster planes. After six months one Japanese was sent to Belawit and executed. He fought the Japanese from Lawas at Ba Kelalan, Bario, Pa Lungan and Lembudut.

David Lian¹⁴⁶ (Maran Tala) was 18 years old and was armed with a Lee Enfield. He trained for three weeks at Bario but never went into the field, as this was after the surrender. His father, Negri Besar, was involved as part of

¹⁴⁰ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹⁴¹ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹⁴² Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹⁴³ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹⁴⁴ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹⁴⁵ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹⁴⁶ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

the Penghulu Committee, and worked as a porter (his photo is in the book *World Within*). After the war he was the first Kelabit to become a teacher. He has lost both of his medals and he has high regard for Tuan Sanderson.

Bala Tuuh¹⁴⁷ (Amat Iuh) was 16 years old when he met Harrison at Pa Main and went to Belawit. As he was a young boy he became a gun bearer for Harrison, sharing a Lee Enfield with another boy. He recalls nine stores parachutes dropping short at Long Bawan. They then trained for three days before dividing into three groups to go to Long Pa Sia, Long Berang and Long Berau. Three days later another nine operatives parachuted in and a permanent camp was set up at Long Liangbuah. He later went to Long Akah and then Marudi where they captured nine Japanese. In an incident at Lawas, a Tagal captured an American and killed him. Harrison captured the Tagals and executed them. The natives considered this fair. He considered Harrison a drinker, a womaniser and an authoritarian. These were not considered good qualities and unfortunately became considered as common qualities of all white men. He has lost his two medals.

Tayun Balang¹⁴⁸ (Paran Matu) was 28 years old in 1945 and recalls seven Japanese aircraft flying at once. During a full week of stores drops at Bario he felt very scared. He used a Lee Enfield and fought the Japanese at Ulu Beluyu and Ba Kelalan. He remembers Bob Long and many other operatives.

Balang Radu¹⁴⁹ (Gria Ipang) said that many weapons were still cached near the original longhouse¹⁵⁰, but that he couldn't locate the exact place.

Sigar Tawi from Long Talal Buda was 17 when he carried a Sten and a Lee Enfield for Tuan Ric and Tuan Harrison. He fought at Long Beluyu, Long Lutok where they killed four Japanese and near Long Semado where they killed one Jap. He received a star and a round medal. He was a Christian before the war and did not cut any heads off. He sent his best wishes to Tuan Sandy.

George Yudan Daring¹⁵² spoke of his father Daring Sial (Daring Balang) from Long Semado. The son remembers Lieutenant Bob Pinkerton and said that his father received the Pacific Star and the King George medal for bravery for staying behind at Long Pa Sia when other guerrillas had run away.

Lamsau Laungan came from Muaya near Sipitang. He was very young when he worked for Tuan Mac (Warrant Officer McPherson) and he was armed with a Lee Enfield. He initially met Semut operatives in Sipitang before going to Miri by sea. He then returned to Merapok then Mendalong, and he fought the Japs at Pulau Bunting near Sindumin. He remembers Tuan Ric and difficult times when it was hard to get food.

Balang Laya was 11 years old when he carried a Lee Enfield for Tuan Ric, Tuan Mac and Tuan Yud (Corporal Griffiths-Marsh). He met Tuan Mac in Eburu and fought the Japanese at Sindumin where two guerrillas, Achang and Jamal, and many Japanese were killed. He returned to Meligan after the war, and thanks Tuan Mac, although he said that his salary never reached him. Tuan Mac gave it to the native chief, but he never passed it on. He never received his medals either, but he felt very humble to be a part of Semut and would like to see Tuan Mac again.

Tiang B. Baling was 11 years old and a farmer, when he worked as a porter for Tuan Mac and Tuan Ric. He was armed with a spear.

Allan Chin Yin Foh's story. 'I worked on a farm at Sipitang overlooking Brunei Bay and first heard of Semut when a native came seeking the headman of the Sipitang area, Mr Yassim, who later told me that the native was a courier from a SRD operative, Sergeant George (Griffiths-Marsh) who with the native and another Chinese man,

¹⁴⁷ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Interview at Bario on 6/7 January 1997.

¹⁴⁹ Interview at Bario on 6 January 1997.

¹⁵⁰ The new longhouse was burnt down in mid 1997.

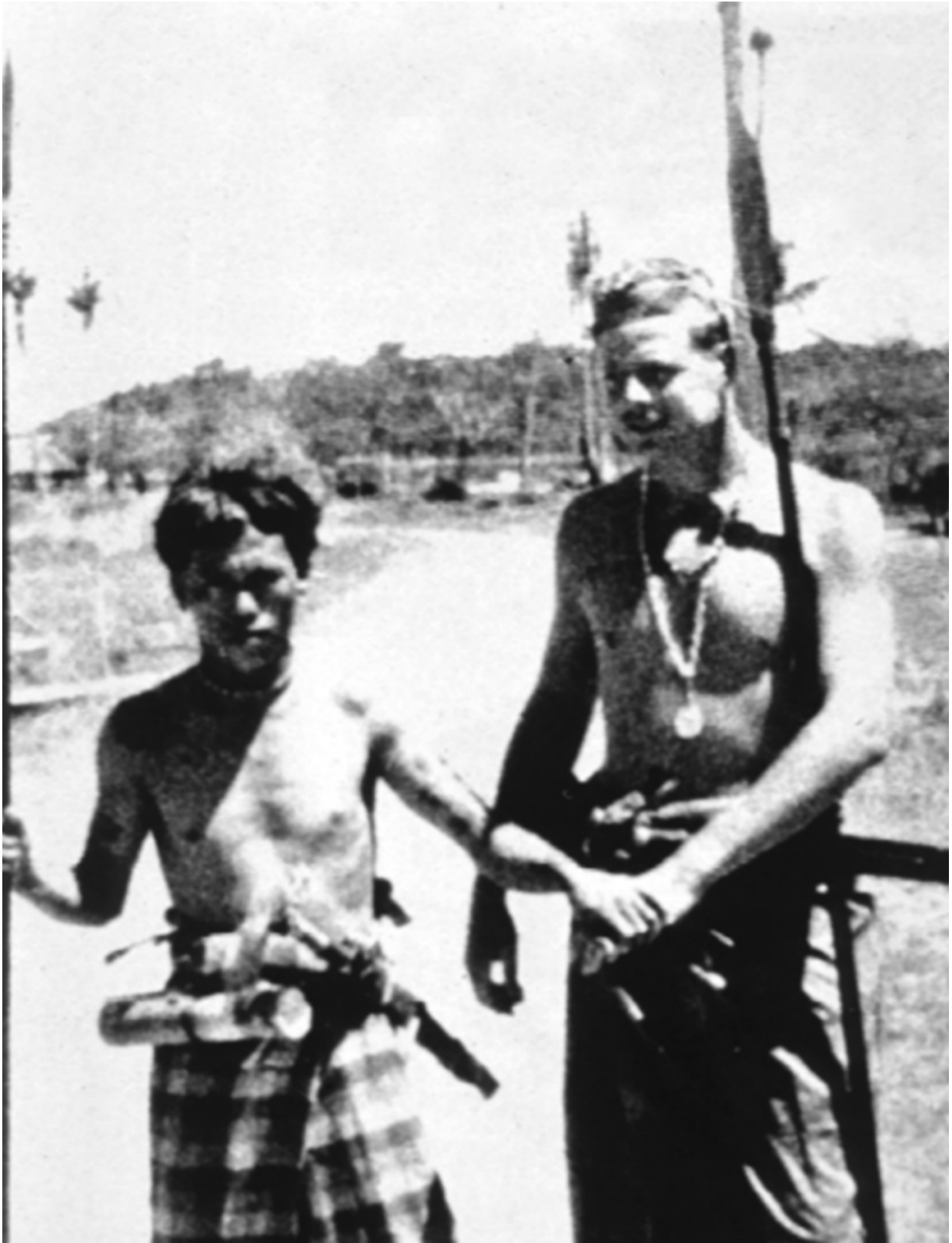
¹⁵¹ Interview at Long Buan Buda on 3 January 1997.

¹⁵² Interview at Long Semado on 2 January 1997.

Ah Toh, were looking for recruits. Sergeant George had set up a HQ in the former District Officer's bungalow and I joined him as a drillmaster and interpreter in the 24-man guerrilla force. We were a happy group and went out to take on the Japanese as far away as Bole on the route between Muara and Tomani where General Baba had his HQ, and which track was used as by the Japanese as an escape route from Brunei. On this track we saw many Japanese women and children who were attempting to get to Tomani and who undoubtedly would have perished. In early 1944, rumours had circulated that a Major Chester (Operation Agas in British North Borneo) had landed in our area by submarine. A former classmate of mine, Albert Kwok, had earlier gone to Tawi Tawi in the Phillipines for interviews with Major Chester requesting SRD support but was told not to commence guerrilla activities as it was too early. Kwok however went ahead and organised the uprising of the Double Tenth in 1943 which had tragic results all round. Japanese reprisals on the civil population were so great that Kwok and three others surrendered, and along with 174 others were beheaded at Penampang. One of the most exciting actions that I recall took place in Sipitang. We had posted sentries two miles apart along the road to Mesapol and on one moonlight night, two of them saw a group of approximately fifty Japanese bypass the shop area and move up the other beach where we located them in a river bed two days later. Sergeant George and the other two Z men and 12 of us took on the 50, and in a fierce 20 minute engagement that took place in torrential rain beneath the thick surrounding jungle, Sgt George's Chinese mate, Ah Toh, was seriously wounded and died some hours later. (Corporal Roland Griffiths-Marsh commented that there were only actually 13/14 Japanese in the group. While the Jap party was originally 50 strong, he and the guerrillas whittled them away as they crossed from west to east through their area.) You will know that I saw hundreds of Australian PW on the way to Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu) near the present Government Printing Office, which was formally a Japanese workshop and hangar. They were reduced to rags and waved to passengers on passing trains. Because passengers gave food to them, the Japanese guards made it compulsory to keep windows closed and passengers had to remain seated. The PW were used as a work force pulling carts from the hangars to the airfield. Following the surrender, I was taken to Labuan by LCT where I served with the unit for a while before returning home to Tenom Estate in 1946 where I was promoted to senior conductor.'

Anthony Wong Tet Chong's story about the seizure of Lawas township on 10 June 1945. When we came down from the interior we stayed in this longhouse (the home of Saraw Kerus a Murut guerrilla whose father, Kurus Kitang was the Kepala Kampung). These loyal Muruts never played us out. They passed on information where to hunt for the Japanese. Saraw at the time was about 31 years old. He was the man who led Mr. Pinkerton (Lieutenant) and others to the hiding place of the Japanese Chief Police Officer, Tommy Sung at Kampung Kerangan. The soldiers arrived there before dawn. It was Saraw and one of his friends who approached the CPO's home at daybreak and called to the CPO to come out because they had an important message for him from the District Officer, Abang Haji Anderson. As the CPO opened the door and coming down from the staircase, almost touching his foot to the ground, Saraw was in hiding came out and shot him, and he fell to the ground. Then Mr. Pinkerton came quickly, drew his pistol and rang two shots at the CPO's head. Thus ended the life of a man whom everyone trembled at the sight of him.

From a guerrilla's perspective, theirs was very much an individual war; a war fought within their tribal groups. In some cases the war allowed them to return to the outlawed headhunting ways. In some ways the guerrilla's actions were simply a reflection of the white operatives they were associated with. Within some quarters of Sarawak, the Kayan/Iban war of 1863 was probably of more significance to those people than the Japanese War. However there is no doubt that WWII had a profound effect on the peoples of Borneo generally, so much so that the move to independence occurred far earlier than either Great Britain or the Netherlands ever imagined possible. Whatever the individual guerrilla involvement was, the Japanese War gave a unity of purpose to the people of Borneo unlike any previous internal conflict.



Lieutenant Rowan Waddy with his blood brother Penghulu Blaja at Bintulu. Blaja took three enemy heads.