



## AUSTRALIAN COMMANDO ASSOCIATION VICTORIA

### AUSTRALIAN SPECIAL WARFARE ORAL HISTORIES

#### Interview Number 14. VX114714 AK84 Captain John Walne Operations POLITICIAN, OPTICIAN and SEMUT IV.

Interviewed by Rob Kilsby.

**Commentator (00:27:26):** John Walne's first connection with Z Special Unit<sup>1</sup> was in 1942 when, as an unarmed combat instructor, he trained sailors under the command of Lieutenant Donald Davidson<sup>2</sup> who were destined for Operation JAYWICK. Following postings to the embryonic Australian Parachute Regiment and as an instructor at the Jungle Warfare Centre, he was recruited to the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB)<sup>3</sup> and posted to Fraser Island as an unarmed combat instructor. He underwent further specialist training at Balcombe and Garden Island and also a three-month language course in Pidgin. Following operations POLITICIAN and OPTICIAN, where he operated in a two-man team off British and US submarines, he was posted to Morotai and then Labuan for SEMUT IV in May 1945. He subsequently served in various police appointments in North Borneo and Brunei and during Confrontation, he advised 22 SAS in Borneo<sup>4</sup>. He's talking today with Rob Kilsby.

**Rob Kilsby** - I'm very pleased to be able to talk to Captain John Walne tonight in reference to his experiences in World War II, as an operative for Z Special Unit.

**John Walne (00:28:35):** Yes. Well pray please excuse the use of the personal pronoun I, as it cannot be avoided. However, any armed service today who does not plan or have or possess the capability of Special Warfare needs its head read, and then dissected. During my career, I have served with Z Special during WW2, and as a Ferret Force commander in Malaya during the Malaysian and Malayan Emergency, and then as a Police Superintendent during the Brunei rebellion. Finally, as an advisor, come what you call helper to the 22nd British SAS in Borneo during Confrontation. So really, I have from the war years up to 1963, a depth of experience I'd say from Korea to the Pacific. (00:30:00)

So having said that SRD, Z Special Unit, and my career with Z was mainly as an instructor, training and then finally on operations. I first had a connection in 1942 with Z Special Unit at the Land Headquarters School of Physical and Recreational Training at Frankston, Victoria where I was a Sergeant, WO2 Unarmed Combat Instructor. One fine day along came a truck with 20 matelots<sup>5</sup> and a Lieutenant Donald Davidson in command and he was of Operation JAYWICK, RIMAU fame in later years. So unbeknown us, these matelots and Lieut. Davidson were to pursue an intensive

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<sup>1</sup> Z Special Unit was the administration and training unit for operatives of Special Operations Australia (SOA) also known by its cover name of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) are

<sup>2</sup> AKN 3 LEUT Donald Montague Noel Davidson, RNVR

<sup>3</sup> Z Special Unit, (SRD)

<sup>4</sup> UK SAS Regiment was reformed post war for these operations.

<sup>5</sup> Army slang for naval ratings



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unarmed combat training and unbeknown to us we did not know why or what for, all we were told was that they were on Special Duties. So, Lieutenant King<sup>6</sup>, Elliott and WO Green and I got stuck into them.

**John Walne (00:31:35):** I would say after the course was completed, five or six would be assessed as excellent, good. The rest were returned to their unit. Of the five or six, I would say they had the killer mentality, psychologically the rest weren't fit or mentally not up to the standard required by us. But that was up to the Navy and Davidson to finally assess. But I understand that three of those, I discovered later on, went on the Singapore raid, and that was Davidson of course and Able Seaman Jones<sup>7</sup> (and Huston<sup>8</sup> However, after that, I went off to Tocumwal, being selected there to go as the unarmed combat instructor at Tocumwal and that was the embryo of the instructional staff for the Australian Parachute Regiment<sup>9</sup>.

(00:32:48): So again, we'll come to it later. The CO and the officers concerned were British. The army officer was a Major in the British Army, and the Wing Commander was RAF, but most of the remainder of the instructional staff were Australians. Now the next person I met on the first intake of officers was Captain Edmeades<sup>10</sup> who was from Z Special Unit. The second connection with Z Special Unit, unbeknown to me on the same staff, was Col McPherson.<sup>11</sup> However I got posted to OCTU<sup>12</sup> and then off I went to become a budding Lieutenant and from there to the Jungle Warfare School and still with my P and RT<sup>13</sup> cap to a degree, but mainly as an Infantry Officer and I thought, "Ah, I'm away at last" and not very long after, you may ask the question, how did I become a member of Z Special Unit was because Major Roberts of the embryo group at Tocumwal wanted to see me at Canungra and he wanted an officer, unarmed combat instructor, for Z Special Unit at Fraser Island. So here I go from Infantry back to Unarmed Combat and turn up at Fraser Island.

(00:34:15): Well, I had a squad up there, very prominent Z Special officers and although I was the squad commander for parade ground administration, operational supervision. They consisted of a Major Harrisson (Edit: Maj Thomas H Harrisson) who was a funny bugger, he was a prima donna. He was SEMUT I eventually, Captain Edmeades who was his 2IC<sup>14</sup>. There was John Sachs<sup>15</sup> later a politician. Anderson a politician. I mentioned these names because they crop up later. Cameron<sup>16</sup>, an engineer became a Regular Army officer and ended up as a Colonel, I think, and he

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<sup>6</sup> V205002 AKN29 Lieutenant King transferred to RANVR

<sup>7</sup> F3383 AB Arthur Walter Jones

<sup>8</sup> B3312 AKN 59 AB Andrew William George Huston

<sup>9</sup> This was actually the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Parachute Battalion

<sup>10</sup> SX11095 AK32 CAPT Eric A. ('Ric') Edmeades, New Zealand Army

<sup>11</sup> NX125429 AK272 WO1 Colin W McPherson)

<sup>12</sup> Officer Cadet Training Unit

<sup>13</sup> Physical and Recreational Training

<sup>14</sup> Second in Command

<sup>15</sup> NX9629 and AK25 LT John Fritz Sachs

<sup>16</sup> Unable to identify



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may be still in the Army today. I don't know. Captain Nicholls<sup>17</sup>, who won an MC in the Middle East, I think the first MC<sup>18</sup> that the AIF and he was brought back to Australia to go around the factories and recruit, I think. R G P M Coombe was a British Major<sup>19</sup>, (00:35:40): Major Sochon<sup>20</sup>) a Brit who was SEMUT III, Toby Carter<sup>21</sup> was there, a Kiwi, he was SEMUT II. So away we went training and I gradually crept into the operational training myself and doing the basic training of demolitions, infantry, weapons, navigation, Folboat training, no languages, although I understand it, Nick Cumon (phon.) a Borneo civil servant who was teaching Harrison Malay, but what for, I hadn't a clue.

On the final exercise, we had to go across Fraser Island after doing a lot of Folboating around the island and in the swamps to limpet the ship<sup>22</sup> which is still there on the other side, on the beach at Fraser Island. That was it and they nearly all disappeared. Where to again, I wouldn't have a clue because the security was pretty tight and nobody knew where they were going, but there was a Lieutenant Chaffey<sup>23</sup> and myself, and Ian Cameron left behind.

**John Walne (00:36:57):** Two of us were called into the CO one day and he said to us, he named a certain officer who was to become the party leader, and would we like to volunteer to go on an operational mission with him? So, we thought about that, and he said, well, obviously you've got doubts, go away tonight, and think about it. Now, this chap was, this officer was a pretty good mate of ours, socially and militarily. So, we went away and thought about it. Next morning, we fronted up to the CO and said, "No". and to this day, I don't think that officer knows that we refused to go on a mission with him. So that was the nature of AIB, that you could volunteer, and you could refuse. Now, you may ask why we refused to go with that officer.

(00:37:51): We knew him pretty well, socially, and militarily, and he was not the person that we in our judgment was suitable to lead a party of four. He had a pretty weak personality in lots of ways, and in other ways, pretty headstrong and he'd get us all killed in one shot, and so we decided we wouldn't take a calculated risk. We'd take the risks alright, but we just weren't happy about it.

After that I was posted with Bill Chaffey<sup>24</sup> to Tabragalba<sup>25</sup>, which was a school run by M Special and the Coast Watchers. It was near Beaudesert in Queensland.

**John Walne (00:38:46):**The object of that posting was three months intensive language training in Pidgin English and when we arrived there, there was a Lieutenant

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<sup>17</sup> NX15737 and AK29 CAPT Henry William Nicholls

<sup>18</sup> Military Cross

<sup>19</sup> VB 121492 AK235 MAJ Robert G P Coombe, British Army

<sup>20</sup> VBD 325894 and AK 240 Major William Sochon, British Army

<sup>21</sup> QX 48608 VB 336939 and AK 247 Maj Gordon ("Toby") Carter), New Zealand Army and transferred to British Army on 7 December 1944.

<sup>22</sup> The shipwreck of the SS Maheno

<sup>23</sup> VX40085 and AKO 388 LT Edwin Cameron.

<sup>24</sup> NX78912 AK30 LT William Chaffey

<sup>25</sup> AIB training school



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Gubbay<sup>26</sup> who was a French-speaking, Pidgin-speaking Australian AIF lieutenant, but he came from a fairly well to do family in Vila<sup>27</sup> (Edit: in the then New Hebrides, now Vanuatu) and also a civilian called Faurebrac<sup>28</sup>, who was French-speaking, but also very au fait with handling large groups of natives and also there was a Captain Bates and a Captain English who had come out from New Britain from M Special and with them were approximately 50 Buka, New Britain natives. I had three months with them, with the ethnics. All day, Pidgin English, all night, sing sing sing sing. So, we were pretty clever, I reckon by three months, but we thought ah, we're going on an operation. Chaffey went off and we knew it was New Guinea because of the Pidgin English.

**John Walne (00:40:07):** I wasn't told anything, and I was posted operationally to our camp down at Balcombe<sup>29</sup> in Victoria for operational Folboat training. So, this was 44 now, 1944 and I thought well, I'll get away sometime. In this training mode, and who should I meet with John Sachs<sup>30</sup>, and we teamed up together. Now whether it was intentional by the higher-ups or whether it was just our personalities together, or I don't know, but we teamed up as a Folboat crew. We experimented down there with various coloured Folboats from brown, yellow, black, red, cream, white to go through which Folboat was the best under all conditions in the moonlight which could be disguised the best and we found that the dirty creamy ones were the best. Then we went down to Sorrento beach, and we got pummelled in the surf there, upside down, we were trying to ride a Folboat in from the surf into the beach, and we could never do it. I guess, looking in hindsight, the answer there was that it didn't have a fin on that bloody thing. We could never do it. So, then we had our final operational exercise and that was to take a Folboat, go to the Altona area and sabotage the oil installations there and from there, go to (RAAF base) Point Cook and sabotage all the aircraft we could find in the hangars and the strip, and get back undetected. So off we went at about nine o'clock at night and up the coast to Black Rock, where we got into the T-trees and slept to the next day. Then we had a 1.1 outboard engine on the back of our Folboat and ping pong balls in the front and the back side so that we wouldn't sink and away (00:42:23) we went for Altona, and it was dark.

We got there, we climbed the fence, avoided any security guards, put our charges on the tanks and the fire installation area and got back we thought undetected and made a beeline for Point Cook using our motor and paddling and got to Point Cook. We put on approximately 15 charges on the aircraft in the hangars. There was one Lodestar<sup>31</sup> outside the hangar with a sentry walking around it, or whether it was a put-up job or not, or whether somebody had been tipped off it suspected that they're having a training exercise or not. We hoped that somebody had tipped him off, because he had

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<sup>26</sup> NX82924 AK41 LT Alan R Gubbay

<sup>27</sup> Port Vila, in New Hebrides now Vanuatu

<sup>28</sup> NHDF9 AK261 LT Marcel B. Faurebrac Netherlands East Indies Forces

<sup>29</sup> AIB training school at Mt Martha

<sup>30</sup> NX 9629 and AK 25 Lieutenant John Sachs

<sup>31</sup> Edit: Lockheed Lodestar C-60



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a rifle, and we didn't want to get one. But John went in under the floodlights and put charges on the Lodestar. Off we went down to the seafront to get our Folboat.

**John Walne (00:43:20):** We thought, oh, well just as a parting shot, we will put one on the Catalina there as well. So, we whipped onto that and off we went, and then struck trouble. Port Phillip Bay, when she blows, she blows and bout two thirds of the way across, we were still going for Black Rock. She (the Folboat) was upended, and we threw the engine over and we kept under the boat, and we had to swim and boy, oh boy, did we swim. Fortunately, the breeze was going in the right direction and the wind was in the right direction, so we ended up near St Kilda and minus a Folboat, minus all our stores, we thought ah well we knew that Ian Cameron's mother was around there somewhere.

(00:44:14) We whizzed off, we had a safe house for the night, rang up Balcombe and said here we are come and pick us up, after that John Sachs got posted. Where he went, I don't know. About two days later, I got posted again and I thought what's going on? Nobody's ever spoken to me about any operation after learning Pidgin-English, Folboat expert, all the rest. So away we went, to Western Australia, Garden Island, where there were approximately 30 volunteers. I mean, Navy, I don't think there was any Air Force, and we were to volunteer for submersible canoe training. That was a canoe where your head was a periscope, and you were in frogman outfit. It was run by batteries and the idea was to get along shipping and put limpet charges on them. At that time of arrival, the last trainees were the RIMAU boys that went off to Singapore (00:45:29) that ended up and got caught and killed. They'd recently been there.

We were the next group in, but out of the 30, the first day was on training and they put us in the water at the wharf and the object of the instructors, who again were all British, Royal Navy and Royal Marines, to see whether we could undertake tasks under the water. Were we good swimmers and were we, I suppose, our breathing system with a breathing suit on. Out of that 30, six only were accepted and I was the only officer, and the others were two Army and three Navy.

(00:46:29): So, we did our SB<sup>32</sup> training right around Garden Island mainly, and around the sea area there and in the harbour. One night after a training exercise, one of the team had psychological problems with deep sea diving and so he had to drop off. So that left five of us, one officer and one Army Sergeant, Sergeant Hayes<sup>33</sup> later of SEMUT I, and an Army Private and two Able Seaman. So, our final exercise was to limpet a corvette, which was anchored near, between Rottnest and Garden Island. We approached it from the sea, the first three put on the limpets, I led the team in, on the corvette three limpets on the engine room and the next one after the next one forward and the last two that were coming in, I had to take the limpets off. We didn't want to know (00:47:39) didn't want to let the Navy know, it was an Australian corvette. It wasn't a British or American. It was quite successful, but the two at the end weren't too happy about it. They wanted to put them on, they didn't want to take the bloody

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<sup>32</sup> 'Sleeping Beauty' the nickname for the Motorised Submersible Canoe

<sup>33</sup> SGT John Delaine Hayes



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things off. However, that was the final exercise, and we were to become the REAPER operation or part of the REAPER operation, which was to go in and limpet all the barges in Rabaul. But they cancelled it. The reason they cancelled was that the higher command were with a General MacArthur leapfrogging, and they didn't think it was worthwhile to worry about Rabaul anymore. Hayes went off and the others went off. I later found out Hayes went to SEMUT I, where he got his MM, and I went to POLITICIAN. Just prior to going to POLITICIAN ...

John Walne (00:48:42): I was humming and ha hing what I was going to do, and it came down through the channel that I could join POLITICIAN and I discovered that Chaffey, Sachs, Anderson, all my old buddies had already been on operational patrols with POLITICIAN. POLITICIAN was teams of two and that's six teams, there's 12 of us and two per submarine, mainly American submarines. Just prior to this, I was carrying out experiments with the SB's and with the American submarines to see whether they could pick us up better than the British submarines on the radar. Because we didn't have any communications in the SB, and we only had a little brass triangle to hold up where the submarine could track in on you and find us. You couldn't communicate and wouldn't have a clue where the mother submarine is. So, the British were tried out and the Americans came in about a thousand yards better than the British submarines.

(00:49:55): But the British submarines were on 60-day patrols where the Americans were on 90-day patrols and they were coming up from Fremantle through the Lombok Straits up through here into the South China Sea, right up to Japan and back. So, there we were. I was teamed up with a Lieutenant Stan Dodds<sup>34</sup>. Stan had been on operations before with Bill Jinkins<sup>35</sup> and Alec Chew<sup>36</sup> on Operation PYTHON which was up here somewhere and one of the earliest operations that SRD ever took (part) in. Dodds and I were accommodated at the Majestic Hotel in Perth where the American submarine crews resided, when they came into Fremantle for recreation purposes. And we were given five pounds a week allowance for grog money, paid by the AIF. We thought this was pretty good, so we'll drink this and in fact, we must've drunk up 15 or 20 quid a week, but the object was to get to know the crews so that you could go out with a submarine, and they'd have confidence in you.

(00:51:13): So, this personality angle comes into it. So Dodds and I were all clued up and then one day USS submarine BRILL<sup>37</sup> came into Fremantle and the CO then asked me to go down and see the BRILL because Sachs and Chambers<sup>38</sup> it's two of our POLITICIAN chaps were on board and they'd been lost. This is the story, which is very interesting because there were mistakes. The captain was a US Captain McCallum, and the exec officer told me the story. The submarine was on patrol up in

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<sup>34</sup> VX 26864 and AK 58 LT Stanley William Dodds

<sup>35</sup> VX 44818 and AK 2 LT William Jinkins

<sup>36</sup> VX 45931 and AK 66 WO2 Alexander Chew

<sup>37</sup> USS Brill (SS-330) a Balao-class submarine

<sup>38</sup> Chambers is not listed in SOA Volume 2 Operations



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around this area here, Sabalana Islands<sup>39</sup>, and they detected a freighter and they followed it. It went into harbour and Sachs said well, I can use my Folboat. I can limpet it and the captain said, okay, so at night Sachs and Chambers got into their Folboat with their radio and charges, and Sachs said, I'll test the radio. He did.

**John Walne (00:52:25):** It was unworkable, unserviceable, but he would not go down to get the second replacement radio. That was a fatal mistake. I don't know why he did it, who knows, but he went off to limpet that Japanese freighter with a defective radio. During the night, the submarine radio operator and the captain heard, not the officer of the watch actually thought he heard shots in the distance. Then later on, a voice came up on the radio in English and they couldn't tell whether it was Japanese, John Sachs, Chambers who, you know, so they were suspicious. They asked they were on the right radio net, so it must've been the radio. I asked, "what is moose milk"? "Moose milk" is what we had at the Majestic Hotel, ice cream and milk, no answer. "What is "moose milk" Johnny? Please explain "moose milk", no answer. Not long after dawn, the submarine was heavily bombed. It limped back into Fremantle with its bulkheads split.

**John Walne (00:53:56):** From that day on Admiral Fife<sup>40</sup>, who was the US commander of the submarine group, cancelled all AIB operations with US submarines. So that left us in a position where we had 12 guys who were submarine orientated for operations, and me still sitting there with Stan Dodds Dan and not going on operations. We were all posted then to SEMUT IV in Sarawak. We flew up to Morotai, and then from Morotai to Labuan Island, and Labuan Island of course is just off Brunei. We were then in a position to be briefed and targeted on the area, which I'll explain to you in a minute. SEMUT I and SEMUT II and SEMUT III were all in the area, that is all in the area from the back of Brunei and down to Sarawak here. Our task was to collect intelligence and take over the area from Miri right down the coast here to Kuching, Kuching being the capital of Sarawak. The closest other AIB party was SEMUT III up the Rajang River just about there and we were at Labuan Island. I was finally going to get away on an operation. The party leader was Major Jenkins who was OC of POLITICIAN and OPTICIAN and a very experienced officer, probably the most experienced operational officer in the Australian Armed Forces during the war. There's no doubt in my mind about that.

(00:55:58): He started his operations in PYTHON, I think it was 43 up here and right through to 45. There, there was Alec Chew<sup>41</sup> an Australia-born Chinese, who was a WO2, and Lieutenant Howie<sup>42</sup> and another chap and me. We were to go down to a place called Mukah, which is pretty close down here, as a pilot, an Australian RAAF pilot had come down somewhere between Sibom and Igan here. We had to get him out and his name was WO Butcher. So off we went in the Catalina and got there at dawn.

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<sup>39</sup> The Sabalana Islands are an Atoll in the Flores Sea in Indonesia, lying just north of the Lesser Sunda Islands, closer to Sumbawa than Sulawesi.

<sup>40</sup> Admiral James Fife, Jr, USN

<sup>41</sup> VX 45931 and AK 66 Warrant Officer Class 2 Private Alec Chew

<sup>42</sup> Edit: LT Ronald Howie



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Now I'll just reflect back a bit because of language. When I had nothing to do with Fremantle there for a while, or the others had flown the coop and I was waiting to be posted to POLITICIAN, there was a captured Malay native in our camp, in the Fremantle area and so I used to spend my days learning Malay, conversing with him.

**John Walne (00:57:05):** This is where it becomes useful. So off we took, we took off from Labuan down to Mukah, landed there and there must've been a communication between the Catalina and Labuan, but Major Jenkins had to go back for another operation, on an American submarine. I became a party leader, where my Malay came in useful was that we managed to get a prahu and go ashore and find out from the natives there were not any Japanese at Mukah at that time. So we went ashore, and we captured the District Officer, at the District Office and the native clerk stuck a pistol in his stomach and said, "You ring up Siboh", which is on the Rajang River here, "and find out whether an allied aircraft had come down, where it was and what were the Japs doing", especially were the Japs coming towards the coast towards us at Mukah or not.

**John Walne (00:58:25):** So, he gets on the telephone and away he goes - No Japs in the area, but an allied aircraft was down between Siboh and Igan. So off we went down towards Igan and there's Butcher on the beach and away he goes on the Catalina. We stayed for two days and then came along the TIGER SNAKE<sup>43</sup> and took us all back to Labuan. At three more days later, they asked us, asked me as party leader to go back to Mukah and establish an intelligence network there, which I did. I recruited the Kapten Cina, the prominent Chinese, and the native chief. I gave him some rice and took off the native dress, which was the medical orderly for the whole area and his wife and child. He was Narayan<sup>44</sup> and his name was Brody, and this is where it becomes useful in any training operation.

**John Walne (00:59:28)** He was a linguist, knew the area and knew a lot of Sarawak because he'd been posted around the area pre-war. We took him back to Labuan. He came in later with a Lieutenant Waddy<sup>45</sup> as a linguist, advisor, and a civilian operative for SEMUT IV. I understand that just towards the end of the war, they shot a Jap on the beach there just near Mukah. He was probably the last Japanese killed in Borneo. I'm not too sure about that, but it could have been. The war was coming to an end in August 1945 and then in my last operation, we moved in north of Bintulu. Bintulu was held by the Japs. Miri is up here where the Japs were still there, and the Australian 9th Division. The Japs were around that area and a little place called Similajau Abo (phon.) here. Again, with another civilian, who could speak Iban and Dayak, he'd been released from prison by SEMUT III at a place called Kapit up the Rajang River.

**John Walne (01:00:46):** He came in and we came down by TIGER SNAKE. Raining, we struck an awful storm and then a storm again, then a storm again and everybody

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<sup>43</sup> HMAS TIGER SNAKE

<sup>44</sup> Ethnic sub group

<sup>45</sup> NX131582 AK55 LT Rowan Eddington Waddy





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on that boat was sick except me. Interchangeability, Wally Witt<sup>46</sup>, who was a naval lieutenant said, "You take over the ship, because everybody's sick, including me. You just steer on that course down the coast until one of us is better, so I kept it up for an hour and Wally Witt came up and said, "You've been off course for the last bloody half an hour, because I'd been reading the back compass, but I was too ill to come and get you." He took over and I was immediately sick as soon as I left the wheelhouse. We went ashore in Folboats and up the river and established a camp at Similajau, with Dayak Ibans. But then the war was at the end and a signal came through Labuan that we were to meet Lieutenant Chaffey who was coming in on the Bintulu River by Catalina, who was to be the party leader for the whole area.

**John Walne (01:02:09):** I took off to walk across, route march across from Similajau to a place called Sebauh to meet the Catalina. And I went off with a Dayak called Awal (phon.), who was my guide and we made it there just as the Catalina was coming down the river. So that was that the object then was to clear the area so that we would allow the Japs to peacefully go down the river towards Kuching, out to the coast, and then down the river from inland areas. That was done. And when we decided, then we'd move in and take Bintulu. We went into Bintulu, using some of the locals as testers for mines, booby traps. We weren't at this stage with the war not going to be caught, you can be assured of that. So, I became the District Officer of Bintulu, still a member of AIB.

**John Walne (01:03:10):** My object was to get the water going and get the population and these, and get the air strip into operation, which I did. Then off to Labuan and home, back to Australia. Then after that I became Chief Police Officer of the west coast of North Borneo and the interior at the age of 22, a Captain and no knowledge of police work. So, I remained there until 1963, when I retired from there. So, I have served in my experience, the British government, the Australian government, Sabah government, and the Malaysian government.

**Rob Kilsby (01:04:19):** Well, thank you very much, John. I've made a mental note of some questions that perhaps you could enlarge upon. First one I'd like to ask you is in reference to the submarine operations, for example, POLITICIAN, and I guess OPTICIAN in particular, the concept of operations. Given that the area of interest for Australia these days is virtually the same indeed as it was in those days, reflected by the map we're looking at here. Do you see a continuing validity for that sort of operations, a small, special team conforming to the submarine operations for opportunist missions?

**John Walne(01:05:22)** Yeah, well I do, but you've got to remember that I haven't seen a submarine since 1946, and I don't know what the technology is today, but the principles are the same and as I said in the beginning that all the armed services in Australia should have the capability and let me assure you from my experience up to 1963, and indeed today, if I'm writing to my friends, all the other governments around

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<sup>46</sup> AKN 26 LEUT Walter King Witt, Jr RANVR



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the area have the Special Warfare capability. So yes, submarines have got to be, it's a must for Navy. Navy's got to come to the party, just like the Air Force has got to come to the party. Somehow, I don't know. I don't know what the submarines are like these days, what the tin cans are like either.

**Rob Kilsby (01:06:07):** Moving on to the ground operations and I suppose as an example your experience with the SEMUT operations, I'd like to ask in particular about party leadership and team makeup. Firstly, the party leaders, what sort of men were they and why were they chosen as party leaders, in terms of their past background and so on? And secondly, the makeup of the team in that there seemed to be a fairly large proportion of officers, viz a viz the other ranks in teams. What do you think of what do you think of [inaudible] there?

**John Walne (01:06:50):** I am going by my experiences during the war and after the war, because naturally being AIB, I met up a lot with Force 136 officers and SOE officers from Europe and Force 136 in Malaya and Burma and so forth. It would appear to me that they were all officers, and this is the British, must be the British mentality that came across because the higher command in AIB or SRD were all British, except for one or two Australians. So, I guess it must've been more officers than ORs. But going back to Fraser Island, the other two squads where I had the officers' squad, the other two were other Australia ORs. But the Brits obviously selected pre-war officers from British army units that had experience in the various areas in the Pacific, in the area, certainly in the Pacific, in the Solomons and certainly in Malaya and certainly in Burma and certainly in the Borneo areas, in some cases Indonesia.

**Rob Kilsby (01:08:10):** These were men who are experienced in the area before the conflict?

**John Walne** - They could all speak the lingo and therefore they became the majority of the leaders with AIB.

**Rob Kilsby (01:08:22):** In terms of actual team selection, that is the operatives for the teams. A couple of areas are of interest. What did you see the problems being associated with a mixed service that is tri-service selection of operatives and indeed civilian people being trained for obviously the right man for the job in special warfare, but what were the problems associated with a mixed bag of trainees in this regard, cross service?

**John Walne (01:08:50):** Well, most of the Australian Army people were the land operations. There was no problem there, Army Australian, or British, but Navy-wise, as I said, I had two Navy chaps in the SB's. Most of the people on the JAYWICK/RIMAU they were nearly all a mixture of Army and Navy. Where the water was concerned, I think the Navy was no problem. You select from the Navy. Oh, I guess that there's no real problem. I know there were two RAAF blokes on land



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operations. One went into Ranau, FLTLT Ripley<sup>47</sup>, to get a few of the chaps from the Sandakan and Ranau death march off the track. And another one went down to Pontianak, Banjarmasin and he was killed but he was a FLTLT RAAF, but those were the only other two, but civilians had been recruited - Faurebrac<sup>48</sup> was as a civilian, but then I think he went on REAPER and was killed, but whether they gave him an honorary military rank, I'm not sure, but I would say there I don't know. Do you mean about the civilians yet or not talking about that?

**Rob Kilsby (01:10:28):** Well, I was thinking about people with could you say ethnic origins or ethnically from these areas?

**John Walne (01:10:37):** Yeah, well, that's an interesting question that is now in our day, we didn't have many ethnic people. It was Caucasian Australians if you like. Alec Chew I mentioned, but he was an Australian-born Chinese who could not speak Chinese. The other SEMUTs, I don't think it's widely known, but there were two Canadian sergeants, Chinese. There was a Canadian doctor, Doctor May<sup>49</sup>, Captain, Chinese. With the ethnic population growth in Australia in this day and age, I'd be going for recruiting for Chinese linguists, Chinese Australians, as long as they were Australian citizens, Vietnamese, Indonesian or whatever. You got a wonderful opportunity to have a good reserve, backup of ethnic people. I'm only too sure that they, you wouldn't have any trouble recruiting and so it'd be useful.

**Rob Kilsby:** Just on the team selection again. What were your experiences in terms of any prerogative for team leaders to choose their own men? Was this a normal case or was an exception to the rule? How did you find that then?

**John Walne (01:11:56):** Well from my experience, I didn't have any selection at all, they were selected for me. I was lucky in those SBs, and I had a good team and if I had to select myself, I don't think I could select better, but other operations such as the Singapore raids, they had, both Lyon<sup>50</sup> and Davidson had the chance to select their personnel. It's very hard to say, but I think the officers should be, the party leader should be brought into have a say, that's for sure.

**John Walne (01:12:40):** That's probably one of the weaknesses during AIB. If there was a weakness.

**Rob Kilsby:** In that they, they perhaps didn't have as much choice as they could have now? It's been obvious from your discussion that language was at times a critical factor, indeed the success of many of the operations. No doubt, you've, you've got some feelings about that in terms of training in particular, which way would you see the best way to go in this regard for special warfare operations?

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<sup>47</sup> 119470 and AKR 3 Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey Ripley.

<sup>48</sup> NHDF9 and AK 261 Lieutenant Marcel Faurebrac, Netherlands East Indies Forces

<sup>49</sup> VB345450 Captain W M C May, British Army RAMC

<sup>50</sup> VB66175 AK231 MAJ Ivan Lyon, British Army



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**John Walne (01:13:19):** Well, I can only give you two examples. I don't know how we got away with it in WW2 in AIB. Sure, the British officers were linguists. I know that a lot of them were bilingual in Malay or whatever it may be in Burma and so forth. But very few, if any, Australians could speak the lingo except in New Guinea, the Coastwatchers were a different kettle of fish then. I just don't know. But it often goes through my mind that the 70 odd chaps that were lost in AIB<sup>51</sup>, how were they lost? If they could have spoken the language, could they have got away? Was it a native that put them away or was it the Japanese that caught them without informers? I don't know what it'd be, we'll never know the answer to that, but I can't emphasise too greatly the aspect of language. I'd like to reflect back on that later, I think.

**Rob Kilsby: (01:14:31):** Well, in the time since the end of the conflict, there no doubt you've had many moments to reflect back on things concerned with in particular the Special Warfare Operations, which you were involved in and helped train and try and taken part. What would you see as some, in your own words, the lessons for the future that perhaps any cardinal points, which young fellows coming on these days, having to train in this area would take?

**John Walne (01:15:03):** I know that you have a RAAF school at Point Cook, and I know that they have language training elsewhere, I suppose, but I've always been struck by the British example of Macau, where they had a Cantonese course, there in tentage for a year. You were not allowed to speak one word of English because you will walk through that front door with your bag. You spoke nothing else, but whatever dialect in Chinese. If you asked for the salt, and you were given the steak and eggs, your good luck. But if you asked for the salt, and you got the latest prostitute from Macau, well, you got the prostitute, but that was intensive. You weren't allowed for a year to speak English. They'd follow you around the shops in Macau when you were 're off duty, and if you spoke English to anybody, you got marked down, downgrade. So, I would say that the language is very important and how you go about it (01:16:06): it's difficult. But I do say that you should have it. It served my purpose, but in the future, I would say as a linguist Pidgin and Motu, and I've served in New Guinea after the war. I'm bilingual in Malay, Indonesian and I suppose Cantonese Chinese, Iban. I can only reinforce it, I suppose, to just give you an example why it is important because wherever you are from the Pacific, from Fiji up to Ceylon, I'll just give you an example. The word "susu" in Malay or Indonesian means "milk". In Singhalese it means "milk", in Malay, Singapore, it's "milk". In Jakarta Indonesia, right through West Irian to Pidgin English. There's no word for "milk", it is "susu", down to Fiji Solomons, it is "susu". Rhymes and rhythms of the sing-sings and the various Dayak rhymes are the same tune right through to Malaya.

**John Walne (01:17:26):** Only the words are different, so if you learn one, I would say Pidgin English or Malay, will get you right through to even the lower Philippine. I would say the other second point is to be an all-rounder in SW. You should be able to be able to do anything. In other words, if you're a wireless operator, you should be able

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<sup>51</sup> This is not a factual casualty figure according to SOA official records.



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to do explosive works, demolition works, medical orderly. We used to be trained in medical to do minor operations and injections, so you've got to be an all-rounder. You've got to understand the Asian and Pacific culture and habits. Why a Chinese loses face, why a Mohamedan<sup>52</sup> is offended and won't cooperate.

**John Walne (01:18:30):** Why you get in New Guinea, you say where the Japanese are or where are so-and-so (???) the future enemy. And he says, go, go, go, go, go, go, go along a little long, long, you think it's so about 50 mile and you go around the track and its half a mile away. So, you've got to understand. Be a survivor you got to be, and I can't emphasize this more adamantly, and survival courses are a must. You should be able to live in the jungle or wherever you are without Western food or without native food. And I used to run a course for the British army in Borneo on survival. And during the Malayan operations, I was in four months with one airdrop, with 60 blokes, 60 natives from Borneo. You've got to be able to combine your military experience, I would say, with management skills, diplomatic skills, if you want to promote a West Irian operative in a future war ahead. You want to make him a general, make him a bloody general, without permission from Canberra, but be sure you select the right man.

**John Walne (01:20:04)** I suppose the principles of Special Warfare are the same today, but the resources are changed. The era has changed. Technology has changed, so it's a different ball game, but the principles are the same. Always, I would say, plan ahead for mistakes in human and technical areas. I always believed, and I still do to this day, that there are sons and daughters of people who have helped Z Special, right through, or Force 136 or SOE, from Vietnam, I guess, the Korean war, I guess, I don't know, who are in the same departments, public servants, or commercial jobs that their fathers were in. They're very, very pro-, a lot, Australian or pro- British. Still, an example is a Chief Minister of a particular country whose son was my Sergeant. Now he's in this position of power. And as a youngster, he used to run around my barracks. I'm pretty sure if, shall we say, the spacecraft from Mars came down and landed in his neighbouring back door, and the Australian team from Special Warfare arrived and said, "Hey, we want your help." He would say, "Yes, I will help you. What do you want?"

I would say that the fathers (Edit: or "sons"?) will assist. Now in conclusion, I'd like to say that in all my experience during and after the war, I would rather trust, and I'm sticking my neck out, the interior people. I won't use the word native, because it's a different age these years and they're more sophisticated, but I'd rather trust the interior natives for Special Warfare W operations, than the coastal ones. Now there are exceptions, obviously, but that's about it, I'd say. How's that?

**Rob Kilsby:** Thank you very much, John. Thank you very much.

**John Walne:** You're welcome.

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<sup>52</sup> Muslim



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