



## AUSTRALIAN COMMANDO ASSOCIATION VICTORIA

### AUSTRALIAN SPECIAL WARFARE ORAL HISTORIES

#### Interview Number 7. SX3396 AK 204 Staff Sergeant Don Horsnell Operation SEMUT II.

##### Don Horsnell is talking to Dave Sheehan

**Narrator:** Don Horsnell enlisted in 1939, and subsequently saw service in Palestine and Syria, and in New Guinea around the Owen Stanley's, Gona and the Kokoda Trail. After being wounded, he returned to Australia where he joined Z Special as a jungle warfare instructor on Fraser Island. Don Horsnell gave up the opportunity to be commissioned and joined Major Carter for an operation. And following parachute training, they jumped into Borneo with SEMUT II from a 200 Flight Liberator. After offensive operations along the Tinjar River in Sarawak, he was evacuated to A Group SRD Headquarters at Labuan in October 1945. Don Horsnell is talking to Dave Sheehan.

**Dave Sheehan:** Don Horsnell, could you start off by telling us briefly your military history prior to getting into SRD and how you became a member of SRD?

**Don Horsnell:** Well, I am going back initially in 1939 I was in the CMF and then in May 1940 I joined the AIF, in the 7th Division. An original member. Went to the Middle East, went to the Western Desert, then into Syria where we fought against the Vichy French. And from there, eventually we were brought back to Australia, after the Japanese invaded Singapore. At that time in 1942, May or March the 26th we landed in Adelaide, and then we then sent up into the Kokoda trail, the 2nd/27th<sup>1</sup> and 21st Brigade. We got cut up there, we fought with them up there in the 25th Brigade, and we eventually pushed them back. We were then airborne over to Popondetta into Gona and there I was wounded on December the 1st 1942, and not seriously wounded but sufficient to warrant me being evacuated to Port Moresby by air.

From there, we came back to the mainland when the battalion was being reformed because we suffered very heavy casualties. I believe we were doing our overland training with the 9th Division, then one NCO from each battalion in the 7th Division and 6th Division were sent to Canungra on General Blamey's orders because they wanted their experienced jungle warfare instructors, and that's when I came to meet my first time Major Campbell, Jock Campbell VC, who was looking for a jungle warfare instructor.

I had been there for six months, and I was rather keen to get out of the place. I couldn't get back to my unit, so Fraser Island<sup>2</sup> beckoned, and I went to Fraser Island, though that's prior to joining, and I was required on Fraser Island to act as a jungle warfare

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<sup>1</sup> 2/27th Infantry Battalion

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instructor. Major Luke McGuinn<sup>3</sup> took over as CO of Fraser Island<sup>4</sup> from Lieutenant Commander Davidson<sup>5</sup>, who had been in the Operation JAYWICK raid on Singapore, and they were about to depart on another one, although nobody knew that at the time, which was Operation RIMAU.

In the progression of events, it meant that I moved in as jungle warfare instructor, although I was only at the time a Staff Sergeant. Major McGuinn was the CO of the school, and from that point on I made up a manual of jungle warfare, scheduled training, and then I operated that for approximately three or four months. Many, many parties passed through my groups of people and were going on operations. They put the lads through my end and learn the various aspects of Fraser Island. Now, if I may consult my notes that they regularly, on Fraser, my main objective was to teach first of all, the identification of Japanese weapons to the operatives so that apart from the other things that they were learning about aircraft identification, and things like that, I then moved into the actual tactics of raiding parties, and I used to emphasize particularly when they had raiding parties, that it was very essential to always have a very definite rendezvous point or even alternate rendezvous sometimes at unintelligible go astray.

Another aspect of the tactics of course was to teach them always to use the advantages of raised observation, camouflage, concealment, movement by day and night, unintelligible through the beach, night unintelligible to the beach, compass bearings, then I moved into the deduction course training area to teach them to be observant of footprints, things like that, to look at campfires, and to assess what had happened there and we just called that straight out deduction.

They were lectured on guerrilla warfare tactics in as much that the principles of guerrilla warfare, you never ever attack a fixed defensive position, and if they took you by surprise, and if you didn't, you withdrew very quickly. You never became involved in a firefight. There were exercises on Fraser which was usually squad versus squad. They would be given a map reference and they would go by different routes to that point, and they would not know what the other squad were doing, so it was at all times practising ambushing, tracking, hiding up at night. We had American jungle hammocks, which we could sleep in the wood when they would hide up for the night, they made sure they didn't leave any tracks. Getting into their base, they'd obliterate everything, so they'd get into a hideout at all times, and made sure they had sentries posted. And above all, attention to detail was very, very important.

**Dave Sheehan:** At what stage during this did you become a member of an operation yourself?

**Don Horsnell:** Well not quite at that stage. I operated giving them two-day exercises, three-day exercises, and eventually we went to attack the SS Maheno which was a

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<sup>3</sup> NX 5413 and AKV Major Luke McGuinn, MC was OC FCS March 1944 to April 1945

<sup>4</sup> Special Operations Australia/Allied Intelligence Bureau Fraser commando School (FCS)

<sup>5</sup> AKN 3 Lieutenant Commander Donald Davidson, RNVR



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wreck on the Fraser Island coastline. That was the culminating point of these three-day exercises. I did not thankfully become involved operationally until I'd been to a pre-selection board. To go to OCTU<sup>6</sup> I had already applied for that earlier on, and when I came back from that not having passed, I was offered the position as a jungle warfare instructor Operative with Major Carter<sup>7</sup> on Operation SEMUT, although it was not called that then, it was just a baby being born.

So, while this is all going on, I became involved with other instructors, learning demolition, learning Folboating, canoeing, and then language of course was very important. Our language instructor was Alex McCallum<sup>8</sup> initially. Alex's father was a Scot and his mother was I think Thai, Siamese, and he was an extremely good in Malay instructor. Unfortunately, Alex was lost on another operation. Then from Fraser, having joined SEMUT, we went down to Mount Martha<sup>9</sup> where we trained seaborne landings, and, carrying those kerosene tins up and down those cliffs at Mount Martha was not very funny, but that's what we were doing. Imagine going standing waist-deep in the water. It was not funny at all, and the sand down there is very, very gritty, and it will get inside your boots.

Anyway, fortunately, that was scrubbed because the monsoon was coming, and they decided they would better go in, internally by aircraft. Long range B24s, which were coming available. So therefore, we were able to go to the paratroop school then and did our paratrooping course at Richmond, and that was in November 44, and our last jump at Richmond, was the beginning of January and we qualified with seven jumps, both SEMUT I and II. Then our squad, we had three Malay boys, each pearl divers from Broome and they were very, very good. One unfortunately failed to qualify because he could not jump out of a plane up there, but he was a very good diver boy and we wanted to use him, so he was eventually used by Z Special in another operation by Catalina.

After doing that we went back to Fraser for a while to maintain our physical fitness, then we moved to Leyburn in preparation for training and converting to jumps with the B24s. And they had one that was 700 feet and out of a Liberator, the speed of exit, only 4 paratroopers per aircraft. the speed of exit we'd jump from 100 mile an hour to 160 mile an hour, which means that instead of going out vertically, you went out at an angle and then the chute whipped right over so that you were almost parallel with the ground, which meant your oscillation was increased considerably, and at 700 feet, you had to stop that oscillation and get rid of any twists, and you hit the ground pretty quick and pretty hard. Then that second time, they decided we might need some aircraft support from the B24s. Wing Commander Graham Pockley of Biscay Bay fame where he sank a couple of U Boats ... He decided he'd come in at low level after we'd dropped and help us, so we went out at 500 feet the next time, and Pockley came screaming

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<sup>6</sup> Officer Cadet Training Unit

<sup>7</sup> QX 48608 and AK 247 Major Gordon 'Toby' Carter

<sup>8</sup> VX 63314 and AKV 28 Captain Ian McCallum

<sup>9</sup> Another Special Operations Australia/Allied Intelligence Bureau school located on the shores of Port Phillip Bay outside of Melbourne, Victoria.



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back with his Liberator at low level, simulating ground support, wrong, when in fact in the actual operation we went out at 3,000 feet.

It's one of these things we didn't quite understand at that time, because we didn't know at that stage where we were going. Only Toby Carter, and Major Harrison and Bill Sochon knew. We completed our two jumps at Leyburn, and then the first party led by Major Harrison, first party of eight, was the immediate Advance Party and they would take off on the 21st of March 1945, which they did, and they went via the same route that we used. Darwin to Moratai which is one long hop, from Moratai then to Mindoro in the Philippines which had only not long been taken by the Americans. From there, they flew down along the Palawan's, past Kinabalu, to their dropping zone there. They had to avoid collisions before they were successful in getting in.

We waited anxiously at SEMUT II Headquarters, we waited for them to give us the all clear that they'd made it. The wireless communication was very, very; well, it wasn't very satisfactory, and we only got garbled messages, but eventually we decided that we would do the same. We'd go in, and the last message we received at Mindoro was that they were operating, but under difficulty.

So, on the 15th of April, we took off from Mindoro where we were briefed. Our briefing stated that this is the first time we really knew our objective. Major Carter had been with the Shell Company at Brunei, Seria, Kuala Belait, Miri, that area, he knew the natives, had spent a lot of time, and he was very sympathetic towards the natives, and he was very popular with them. He was actually the party leader. We took off there at Mindoro after being briefed, and these were our objectives.

The first thing we had to do when we got in was to carry out intelligence, gain all the intelligence we could to find out how the natives had reacted to the Japanese invasion. Were they pro-Jap, or were they sympathetic, or were they pro-British, still pro-British? Now, if you know the history about Sarawak, the White Raja of Sarawak. Three centuries the White Raja that controlled Sarawak and governed it very wisely, and thank goodness, because otherwise we would have been RS. We were received very welcome, very strongly by the tribes.

Our third objective was to observe the natives' attitude was to deny food to the Japs, in other words readily whittle their supply that was getting to them through to the coast and we were to remain passive at this stage and establish ourselves right throughout the length and breadth of Sarawak. So again, SEMUT looked after that part of North Borneo and Northern Sarawak. AGAS of course another operation, which we didn't know anything about, and then SEMUT I, II, we were SEMUT II, SEMUT III an offshoot of ours, and then eventually SEMUT IV and V so that by the time the invasion by the Allies, we were in position. Then having trained our guerrilla forces, we were in readiness to attack.



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Now, if I may refer to a photograph here. This is actually the journey down the Akah. Well, after we landed, Bill Sochon<sup>10</sup>, myself, Abu Kassim<sup>11</sup> the Malay pearl diver, ex pearl diver, Sergeant in the Australian Army, and a Malay boy, a Kelabit guide took us over the mountains, and the Abu Abu road range here, which is about a 5000-odd mountain climb, and we spent two days getting to Long Lellang. The main party followed us later, but at that stage, Major Harrison<sup>12</sup> did not supply us with any carriers. I lugged my Bren gun, which had been thrown out after being, when we jumped, and which I secured. That's another story, quite a long one, but right now, I want to get on with this part of it.

So as came down, and we then started training at Long Akah. We go down the Akah River which has bad rapids. These photographs show you these narrow prahu's and they're very small, low-freeboard and these rapids were never caught on the maps. Such as they were, they weren't very accurate and in fact, very few white men had been in this territory before. That's a shot of the chiefs that waited for us. They had all been brought together by Penghulu Tama Wing Ajang paramount chief of the Baram. He brought all these 16 penghulus<sup>13</sup> here, and each penghulu represented something like 10 kampungs, so and each kampung represented say 20, or 30, or even 50 families.

So, you had a big representation waiting for us, and after everyone unintelligible sounds like Long Semado very long time, three days, they decided they'd throw in their lot with us, and they wanted the return of the Sarawak government. We then moved in position to commence actual operation/raid when the invasion started, my particular project was, or before I get onto that, I must say the training of the guerrilla forces, which I chose the training the squad with the US carbines and Owen gun. Here we got the short barrel Lee-Enfield's.

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<sup>10</sup> VB 325894 and AK 240 Major Bill Sochon, British Army

<sup>11</sup> W91761 Private Abu Kassim

<sup>12</sup> VB 300861 and AK 236 Major Tom Harrison, British Army

<sup>13</sup> Penghulu is the headman or chief of a region in traditional societies on the Malay archipelago in Maritime Southeast Asia..



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Guerrilla forces training with the .303 Australian Rifle  
Photo: AWM

These are the Punans which we used, these are the nomadic people, who are only armed with blowpipes, and they do all their hunting, and they eat whatever they can catch in off the land, and the fish they can catch in the rivers.



Guerrilla forces training with the US carbines and Owen gun.  
Photo: AWM

This is a shot of my first Dayak guerrilla who came to join us, and he has a pedang, which is a big sword, as distinct from the parang. There's one there.



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An Iban warrior with pedang in hand.  
Source AWM

Now then, every warrior had a parang, and these are used as ubiquitous sort of a tool. It can be used for building kampungs, huts, any work at all requiring what would normally be an axe, and of course it is an excellent weapon, and for clearing through the jungle. It's balance with that angle on it, it will not slip in the jungle where it's wet, and perspiration, and things like that, and its hollow ground on one side, and you might see the hollow in that side, and that's side is bevelled so you have an excellent weapon, which is far, far superior than the machete.

There's a shot of a Kenyah warrior in full tribal regalia. They were magnificent people.



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Photo: <https://www.pastmasters.net/z-special--catalina-base.html>

Their physique was excellent, and their thigh muscles were very, very big. They were unintelligible 5'5", 5'6". At Long Akah, we received our first resupply drop, that's the DZ right there in Long Akah. The B24 came over, and from a height of 1,200 feet, it dropped four storpedoes. We see one of the storpedoes there with four natives carrying it. In that was our supplies, and they had to drop that into that DZ there. That was our dropping zone alongside the Baram River. The Akah came down there and then continued on down to the coast at Kuala Baram which is near Miri.

That was the fort. Fort Long Akah was there. It was only a wooden structure that was the seat of the government at that area. And the penghulu's kampung was there. He was as I said the Paramount Chief of all the Baram and the surrounding regions. That is another shot showing the parang. Some of them were decorated very extensively along there. They all had wooden scabbards because the leather was no good it would rot in the jungle.

Our next objective was to deny the Japs any retreat once the invasion started. Not like unintelligible anywhere they escaped at the interior. Here we wanted to cut them right off.

Now, at SEMUT group, with Major Carter the CO, Captain McCallum was the MO, we left him at Bario as a medical captain. Later he joined. We had two Sikhs, Wally Pare and Kel Hallam. Then we had Teh Soen Hin who jumped with me, and Sergeant Bob





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Long who we left behind at Bario taking over from Doug Bower a name which would be known to you.

My first assignment in Akah was to go down the Baram, or approximately halfway to the coast to find, if possible, a Catalina landing strip. I did find one, which I thought would be long enough, took compass bearings, and returned. Now, on that trip, after three weeks in that country, I learned more Malay than I had learned in the preceding six months, because nobody was speaking English. There's only one way to learn the language, it's to practise it. But the tribes had pledged all their allegiance to us. They had given us every possible encouragement, carrying parties, portage, everything. They were very, very honest people. Anything dropped and they found it in the jungle, they always brought it to us.

My next major assignment was to go into the Tinjar, which is a tributary of the Baram, and looking for map I forgot. I placed it up there. This makes it easier.) There's Long Akah. Now, that was my first reconnaissance down there, and then my second job was to go down into the Tinjar headwaters there but also in the meantime, I've gone over into the upper headwaters of the Belaga and down into the Rajang and its headwaters there. I (**unintelligible**) set up my first sub headquarters out of those and (**unintelligible**) here, I directed Sergeant Teh Soen Hin who was my assistant at that time.

I said, "Will you take a patrol, and you go down into the upper unintelligible and the upper Bintulu River and block any Japs coming behind me as I moved down, and also to protect Major Sochon's back door there. I moved down into this area here, down to Lake Loagan Bunut, which is a dead lake in the summertime, or when I say summertime, before the monsoons come. When the monsoons come, it fills up very quickly and it's infested with crocodiles, but it's an ideal dropping zone in the dry, where I received a resupply drop there and doing this down there, I trained the representatives at Beluru there, and it was there that I received my first two Jap heads. Two Japs had wandered into a kampung at unintelligible sounds like Seruas. At that stage, we were still passive, and we did not intend to attack the Japs until the invasion had started. Well, the invasion had started, but we weren't quite ready at that stage. I think I only had about 14 trained guerrillas, weapon-wise. I conferred with the kepala[3] kampung called (**unintelligible**) sounds like Libang I can't knock off any number of Japs whether, one's and two's okay, but when against any more than that, I think I can only contain them. If you can help me and knock off any you can. Any traitors I'll get.

So, two came through and two heads were brought to me one morning and Leo Duffus my wireless operator who joined me at Long Lew we were having our breakfast and these two guys walked in with dilly bags on their back, and they said to me, "Good morning," in Malay, and I just said "Good morning. What's the news? Apa kabar?"



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which is the usual greeting. And he said he's got two bijis. They had to do a "biji". "I've got two rounds things for you." I said what?? ...two heads... I had promised them eight dollars a head he held out his hand, and I promised them \$8 a head, any Jap head I give \$8," and he said, "Right. \$20!" So, I handed over the \$20 bucks and he said, "What are you going to do with those heads?"

I said, "I'm not going to do anything with them. I don't want to see them anymore." I said, "You've got your dam bucks but don't bring them back anymore." He said he's going to take them and smoke them and hang it up in his long house. Well goodbye.

We next received word that there was a Jap patrol around eighteen strong coming from the direction of Belulu. I said well, we've got to do something about these guys, and by subterfuge, Libang when they arrived, he said "There's a pantang." pantang means a taboo. Taboo is that "I can't let you into the village. You can put your weapons in there if you like or if you leave your gear and then I'll bring you food, borak and everything you want. Out in this clearing unbeknown to the Japs that led to their parangs in the grass around my guerrillas had moved into the tracks surrounding, and when the balloon went up, the Jap's heads went of. Whole 18 lot of them, 18 in one swoop, and so we had another 18 rifles which we could add to our guerrilla force. I had to pay out of course of that too. So, it went on.

The Japs at this stage were still not aware of the ramifications of what's going in the interior. They just said, "Oh, 18 men." and those 18 men were originally intended to go down and get behind Major Wilson's party, which was moving down here, and they found out that our Japs were going down to just get into Marudi, so they said well, "Let's come down the river and then go down the Tinjar. Well, they just disappeared, and it was about a week later, that they decided that they'd do something a bit more aggressive. They sent out more patrols which we commenced to knock off.

I had one Iban ex-constable called Megong. He was very intelligent. That's why I made him a patrol leader and let him loose into the Beluru area and to stir up as much trouble as he could in that area. Which he did. He knocked off eight Japs in one ambush, near Beluru on the northern side of it and then he moved around the southern side. But unfortunately, the Ibans in the Bagong area were more pro-Jap and he had to retire.

He retired back to join me at Lake Bunut, and he reported on what he'd done, and he returned on the 16th of August, which was a day after war was supposed to have ended. He had accomplished a very good solution, and this is a sort of patrol activity which is most valuable. When the Japs did attack in force I moved, with all my guerrillas up to a place called unintelligible sounds like Damang and I had far too many that could patrol properly so that when the Japs started moving up, we ambushed quite a number. I think it was 18 we got out of one ambush and so on.

We then came back, progressively down the track back towards the Tinjar and the Japs were following, and they burnt every vacated village as they progressed.



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However, all the side-tracks, all natives were evacuated, with their food, rice and out of their harm's way and we did not lose any natives to the Japanese, only the villages.

I'd been reinforced by Sergeant Bob Mason, into AIF, members of SRD and a place called Lutong. Bob Mason moves up into the Kelabit at a place called Bukit Batu with his patrol. He was able to ambush quite a number of Japs in that area and delay their approach. Meanwhile, I'd moved over into the Sabuit area to contact the ex-Police Inspector called Ben unintelligible sounds like Branda. Inspector Branda and Toby Carter had instructed me that I had to go over there, and if possible, contact them, which I did. I only took ten men with me and we got within an hour of the Japanese concentration in that area. I met the Inspector one night and the leader of the village and I asked him if he was going to help us in harassing the Japs, but he was reluctant to do so. He said, well, he was pro-British, but he did not want to stir them up because they were in force and we only had a very small number to protect him. I said, the best thing you can do is to gradually withdraw your supplies. Gradually move whatever you can into the jungle, away from it and gradually let them lose their support.

So, we could think of retiring back down to unintelligible and then the Japs were pursuing. I went down and made a forced march, and I went down into the Tinjar and then down to Marudi which had been retaken by the AIF. I asked for assistance, which was not forthcoming with the war at that stage. I think they realized it was coming to a close and they weren't going to get their head shot off chasing Japs in the jungle. So, we were left to our own devices. Bart and I returned from Marudi, to Long Teru, and Long Edjoy on the Tinjar with the help of the Tiger Snake, the boat which my friend.

**Dave Sheehan:** Speak about it later.

**Don Horsnell:** Peter Back was on board and then in command Wally Witt, Lieutenant Witt and they transported a lot of supplies back to Long Teru which helped out the natives whom I'd evacuated much earlier.

Eventually, I received orders from Marudi, wanting me in three/these days to withdraw completely out of it. So, I complied in part with the order. I said, "All the three men I had with me, the three men and whatever, the guerrillas I had, which included some of the Netherland Army chaps who had escaped from the Japs and joined me. I sent them back to Marudi. Wireless operator Leo Duffus remained with me so that we could keep the communications open.

This action was later approved by Colonel Leach when he came in and wanted to find out why I had not obeyed instructions to withdraw and my words to him at that stage were, well, if I pull out now, no white man will ever hold his head up in this area again. That is a two-edged meaning of course, if you get the meaning. I carried on at unintelligible Beluru, Loagan Bulut and eventually when the Japs had surrendered, I maintained patrols until they moved out into the Miri area. I made up with, above the river, to pay off the natives, whose job unintelligible and then when I came back, I handed over to a Lieutenant Plant of the BBCAU.



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My final withdrawal order read from Toby Carter said, "Lieutenant Plant will take over from you in the Tinjar forthwith. You'll please supply him with all relevant matters of debts, which had amounted to something like \$1,500 Australian, sorry \$1,500 Straits dollars which is about \$300 or \$400 Australian. And the SRD will account for that amount of money in the future."

At the same time, would I put him in the picture, regarding the relief to the tribal people. With the reference to the police, Lieutenant Plant will discuss the matter with you but it's essential that unintelligible no good total complement of for the Baram 950 rifles for the Penans, 20 rifles may be left with Lieutenant Plant and a transaction has been compensated with a deduction of rifles twenty from Marudi. Transport away from Marudi will leave on the night of the 12th,13th that actually turned out to be the 19th. So that it will be necessary for you and Sergeant Duffers, to arrange to be there by that date. It is unfortunate that you'll not be able to have a makan besar, which is a big feast.

So, I paid off all my troops, the records of which you have down at Swan Island and said goodbye very reluctantly to a lot of the people who were very fine people. I hoped that they would get compensation at the return of the Sarawak Government.

I issued each of my guerrillas with this chit which stated, "This is to certify for example, Corporal Megong, an Iban of Kampung Ladong, ex Sarawak Constabulary. who was a patrol leader of 16 Ibans, shows the guerrilla borders in the Tinjar. He served from date to date. I trained with here with himself extremely well with the fighting and the fighting against the Japanese and I highly recommend that he be given preference in employment for the future." I signed them as such and each of my guerrillas received that and actually these were chits Toby Carter received when he went back as Field Superintendent in Seria. He kept on getting these chits for years afterwards. Then they would unintelligible. I did work for Don Horsnell-Don Horsnell and so it went on.

To sum up all of this. All SEMUT operation objectives were achieved, mainly because the method of insertion by B24s and the precision dropping by supplies of the B24s and the 200 Flight aircraft were really remarkable. If we had tried to get in by sea it would have been, I think doomed to failure because the coastal world, the people in that area were not exactly anti-British but they were under the thumb of the Japanese. It would have been very highly likely that we would not have succeeded whereas in the interior we were able to build up our strength. We had the complete support of the indigenous people.

Our method of insertion was excellent. We were experienced and knowledge by Major Carter and to a certain degree by Major Harrison and Bill Sochon. They contributed to our knowledge of the people and that helped us immensely. Logistics again, supplies by the B24s and Catalina's. Reinforcements were flown in, dropped in. In fact, there was one, Leo Duffus incidentally, he came in with Lieutenant Stan Eadie, who was an Englishman, wireless expert because we were running into trouble with the communication. Stan Eadie had never ever jumped out of a B24, had never jumped



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out of an aircraft in his life. He got some instruction from Duffus at Mindoro in how to get in and out.

It was agreed that Eadie would go first because he said that if you go I might not. He said, no you've got to give me a shove out. When it came to the crunch over Long Mado, Eadie froze let's say too long and Eadie would end up in the jungle, and Leo would end up in the river in that Baram which was running pretty fast. Fortunately, we were aware of the dangers of anybody overshooting the DZ and the natives in prahus pulled Leo Duffus very bedraggled out of the river. Poor old Stan was jumping up and down in a tree and he didn't know what to do with these natives all jumping around gets away with their parangs yelling at everything and he didn't know the lingo, he didn't know anything. Anyway, he did the drop we gave him to do but it took a lot of guts for him to get out of a B24 for the first time ever. But he was a first- class wireless operator or mechanic.

Intelligence network with a team and set up security and maintained. It wasn't until the invasion started and we were in position that the Japs had any idea at all that we're in that area. Again, thanks to the natives, who were in the war and their policy of ambushing and withdrawal was carried out with the help of the locals of course local knowledge is always advantageous. Knowledge of the terrain is actually very important, and they'd link back even with a blowpipe but at times with the Japs looking over shoulders they didn't know. It made them very uneasy, and they did not like moving out in anything less than large numbers. Eventually some did escape from the Beluru area, and they gone over into the Tutoh and went up. Then they caused quite a bit of trouble in the SEMUT I area before they were eventually rounded up.

We removed food and prahus and denied the Japs transport by rivers which were the only way you could really travel any distance in Borneo and Sarawak. Which they used incidentally the land of many rivers and everywhere you looked there was a bloody river. If you didn't see a river, you saw a mountain alongside it. We maintained patrol and scouting activities both passive and active even after the war we did not relax our effort to make sure the Japs didn't get away. The only recommendation I can make arising from this, is to improve the medical training of operatives. Medical training in terms of looking after themselves because if their feet give up on them there's no mobility and it's very, very important to look after their personal hygiene. Limit the size of a patrol to 10 or 20. Physical fitness again, is always of paramount importance and course communication. In summing it all up, we could not have achieved this without help of those natives and people of the interior of Borneo and Sarawak. The Kayans, the Kenyahs, the Kelabits and the Ibans. And in some of the coastal regions, some of the Malays and some of the Chinese. I think that just about sums up my talk on the operating of SEMUT II.

**Dave Sheehan:** Colin Macpherson had mentioned in his talk that a few years ago he went back to Borneo, and he met some of the guerrillas again. Have you had a chance to be in contact with any of them again since the war?



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**Don Horsnell:** Yes, indeed. I received a very surprised phone call. I was very surprised to receive a phone call from Brigadier Tom unintelligible. He was a retired brigadier in 1958. I was in Robinson in Angus Street that's just around the corner, he had the Angus Engineering workshops. Tom rang up and said, Well look we've received advice that a party of Borneo people, tribesman or heads of tribes from Borneo are coming and they are in the care of the British Foreign Office Service of Australia. It was one of these chieftains, who said when asked if you know anybody, he said well he knew Don Horsnell-Don Horsnell was in Australia. Don Horsnell-Don Horsnell because he had one of my chits and now to cut a long story short, we met the Temengong as he was then on the Legislative Council and we had dinner at the Naval & Military Club.

After which on the way to the Brigadier's home I asked if we could divert to my home. I had trained my 10-year-old boy to say a Malay phrase which said, "I give you this knife because you have helped my father during the war." And the knife was a silver Syrian dagger which I'd brought back from the Middle East. And the chief picked up my son and gave him a hug and then said, Oh it's marvellous that he can only Malay. Then my son said, I speak perfect Malay, "Saya kasih ini pisau sebab awak tolong saya punya bapak". He just picked him up and hugged him and the British Foreign Office chap in charge, well he'd never seen a better bit of PR like that before.

Because I was a salesman of course. Anyway, there was just unintelligible, and they were magnificent people, and the chief was down the next day. I had to take him from the Hotel Australia where he was staying in. He didn't like the escalators anymore. Didn't like those at all and lifts too. He didn't care much for those either, he didn't understand those things. Then he went to the Rostrevor College because he wanted his people to transfer into Christianity, become Christians and Rostrevor of course is a Catholic College. It was near where I came from Magill (Edit: an eastern suburb of Adelaide) and also Scully (???) where I was born and bred. I took the Chief there; he had his conversation with their interpreter of course, not me.

Then their interpreter had the knowledge and he picked up all of it was about them embracing Christianity. Then I took the Chief up home into the Gully and even my father who I had unintelligible, but he didn't know anything. Back then I couldn't ring him up, he didn't have a phone on. My father had a grazing and orchard property. When he saw the Chief, he kept on saying to the Chief, "Oh you looked after my boy" and then unintelligible interpret it for you. You can stop talking so slowly and just tell me what you want to say, and I'll interpret".

The chief was very impressed with the Gully he didn't somebody who done like the jungle unintelligible He hadn't seen anything like that, but he didn't like the wind. They don't like wind, strong wind. Well then that was my only time that I met up with the people after I'd love to have gone back there in some ways. I'm glad I didn't. I was offered a job with the Sarawak Constabulary by Eric Edmeades I even unintelligible and I said, "No, I don't think. I don't think my wife would agree to that. Naturally I went my way, and Eric went his.



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**Dave Sheehan:** Thank you very much Don Horsnell.

**Don Horsnell:** Great. Thank you, goodbye.

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