SRD in the Padas & Trusan, April – September 1945.

Editorial Note:

The Services Reconnaissance Department, Australian Army equivalent of Force 136, has been the subject of comparatively little publicity. Misunderstandings have in the past arisen as to its role and scope. Mr Tom Harrisson has therefore provided, at our request, the following notes to introduce the accompanying article by Capt. Edmeades M.C. Mr Harrisson writes:

The first S.R.D. party was dropped at Baleo in March 1945, as stated by Capt Edmeades. The primary objectives of this party were to assess & prepare the way for the next: (i) To ascertain the practicability of wide-scale intelligence operations prior to Australian mass landings; (ii) To facilitate the insertion of further personnel. cover the widest possible area. Although primarily to collect intelligence from main land focus. At that time, it was not considered likely that guerrilla action against the Japs would be practicable on any scale; in fact, it turned out that the people were so keen & so anti-Jap that in the end this became S.R.D's major role in Sarawak & North Borneo — North Borneo was an entirely separate show, although (as Capt. Edmeades shows) a small piece in the south-west corner was eventually allocated to my command.

By portable wireless we informed Australia (Darwin) that wide-scale intelligence could certainly be obtained & gave the information necessary to implement role (ii). Once my party was established Major G.S. Carter D.S.O & Major W.L. Sochon D.S.O. were dropped with 6 others at Bario. They proceeded overland to the Akar & down into the Baram, where they received from the Kenyahs the same enthusiastic welcome we had already

Para after the two Baram drops already detailed,

the personnel of Serviet 1. were subsequently dropped mostly at Belait (see below), ~~[illegible]~~ & later brought in by Auster; Serviet 2 ~~later~~ subsequently dropped at Long Akar & came in by seaplane; Serviet 3 were able to use mainly Catalinas ~~[illegible]~~ on the Rejang.

It should be explained, therefore, that Serviet 1 was subdivided into five areas, ~~[illegible]~~ necessarily by the terrain (nearly all this area being non-navigable rivers) and airfields

(1) 5th Division (Sarawak) & Padas (North Borneo), under ~~the~~ Capt Edmeades, again dividing into Limbang, Trusan & Padas sub-areas.

(2) North-west ~~[illegible]~~ Dutch Borneo, incl. H.Q. airfield at Belait (after moving east from Baram) & the ~~under~~ Kelabit country, directly under me.

(3) ~~North east~~ Lower Baram area of Dutch Borneo & up to Pensiangan in North Borneo (where we learned but could not trust the Japs up to the Armistice) under Capt P. Lesboquet & ~~Lt~~ ~~(4) Lt. G. Wesley MBE~~.

(4) The coastal plain down to ~~Jerudong~~ opposite Tarakan — the ~~Australian~~ ~~did not~~ Australian 2nd Corps did not operate off Tarakan Island in this area — under Capt. A. Blondell. M.C.

(5) The Bahau-Batang Kayan, most of the time under Lt G. Wesley, M.C.

~~Capt Edmeades~~ In all, 49 Officers & NCOs were dropped or landed in Serviet 1 area by the end of the war.

Capt Edmeades account therefore covers one of the five sub-areas of one of the three SRD commands. Each had its peculiarities — & all had ~~[illegible]~~ hectic times.

Lt. F. Anderson D.C.M. was in command on the Limbang ~~for~~ during the chaotic period when a large Jap force went up that river; Major R. Blair, OBE & only 4 other survivors of this column at the end of October.

experienced ~~in Sarawak~~ from the Kelabits & Muruts. ~~Thus~~ Major Lochore then continued over to Belaga & in the Rejang, Major Carter remaining on the Baram.

It had originally been intended that Major Carter should command the whole Sarawak operation. But owing to the unexpectedly rapid success of our work, ~~as our~~ lines of communication & areas of control, especially over into Dutch Borneo, very soon become so considerable that ~~we were organised as~~ we were reformed into three separate commands: ~~divided~~

Serviet 1, under me, for the Kelabit & Murut country, ~~down~~ northwards ~~over~~ to Brunei Bay; & Dutch Borneo as far south as ~~Long Apoi~~ the Batang Kayan.

Serviet 2, under Carter, the Baram, ~~Beitang~~ & Tinjar rivers, Bintulu & Miri areas, & the backside of Brunei.

Serviet 3, under Lochore, the Rejang & southwards.

A fourth party, under Major ~~A.C.B. Carter~~ OBE was about to start extensive operations well south of Lochore when the war ended. ~~Had the war lasted longer, the Rejang stay would have become~~

Para Capt. Edmeades in this paper describes, ~~with his usual modesty~~ what went on in the north-west part of Serviet 1; ~~east of him was Capt. Blondell, M.C.~~ ~~to~~ got down as far as Tarakan on the ~~east coast~~; my ~~personal H.Q.~~ & area of close contact was the highlands of the interior; I ~~soon~~ moved ~~our~~ our H.Q. to Belait over the Dutch Border, where we had an excellent airstrip. ~~South of this was Lt. Wesley, MBE; & while Capt P. Lesboquet had a roving commission, in all Serviet 1. had 49 officers & N.C.O.s by the end of the war, and well over 1000 native troops.~~

Capt Edmeades omits from his account his ~~very~~ valuable recce trek to Long Lelong to prepare the way for the next ~~party~~ parties, before the second party came in; the ~~a second recce of 13~~ people. Similarly he mentions a second recce of 13 days to secure the goodwill & secrecy of the Kenyahs & Sabans to the ~~south~~ south on the Bahau & Kerayan. ~~These were~~ These were jobs he did which contributed much to the whole later progress of SRD in Sarawak & Dutch Borneo.

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Throughout he barely indicates the ~~immense~~ tireless energy & ability he himself showed. "Ivan Rix" remains a beloved memory wherever he went in 1945, & is well on his way to becoming a hero of legend & song for future generations. ~~Of Mounts & Kelabits.~~ Bario he is the most popular character in children's games.

It should also be explained that the ~~value~~ information he & his subordinates (indeed Lt Pinkerton MC, Sgt W/O Macpherson MM & Sgt J. Sanderson DCM) obtained was, from the first, very valuable to the regular forces. ~~It was~~ In association with the parallel information obtained further south & ~~east~~ west by ~~Dennys~~ Major Carter, ~~Gh Aust Corps~~ 2nd MacArthur's headquarters was very fully informed of Japanese movements & dispositions long before the June–July landings in Brunei Bay & on Labuan. Subsequently, we were able to supply day to day information ~~to~~ Gh Aust. Div. direct on Labuan, also to 6 Div ~~on the east coast~~. Tireless (on the east) was, of course, the key, & Lemnt 1. had stations at Long Semadoh (Trusan), Pa Matang (Padas) ~~in Edmeades'~~ ~~area & who reported at Bah Ko~~ & later a boat at Tomani & Lawas ~~also~~ in Edmeades' area, netted to Belait HQ, ~~which kept~~ with other stations suitably disposed in other ~~areas~~ sub-areas of the command, as already indicated.

~~Edmeades, also~~ The denial of food & other supplies to the Japs ~~then very short~~ ~~in the~~ was a subsidiary job to which Edmeades' contributed a lot. ~~The~~ Actual ~~Kilta~~ guerrilla fighting was not in order wanted until after the Australian landings; before that we only took aggressive action to prevent information about us reaching the Japs. ~~The~~ The degree of success in this was a remarkable tribute to ~~[illegible]~~ native integrity. By ~~mid~~ June, when the Australians landed in Brunei Bay, tens of thousands of Borneans were ~~[illegible]~~ ~~we~~ were there, airfield & all. But the Japs, though puzzled at what was going on inland, had

Cond columns of Japs expecting fairly easy travel overland to Sapong BHO got a nasty shock hour after hour, day after day, a week after week — one lot of them for four months of jungle misery.

It was owing to the interest taken by Mr Alistair Morrison, then D.O. Lawas, that the account was even written, & thanks are due to him & to the Resident Mr T.C.B. Fisher, — who himself played a major part in Element 3 — for arranging the matter and passing on the result.

two ideas an organised and rapidly growing force existed inland. Thus, when D-day came with Australian landings, Edmeades' people were able to attack and completely surprise the Japs on the coastal plain, as other groups did elsewhere too.

There is plenty Capt. Edmeades has not said in his account, partly in modesty & partly because — in those rather chaotic days — he did not always know all that happened even in his own area! But as a brief straightforward version by a soldier, his document deserves a worthy place in the war history of Sarawak.

I have made, at the author's request, a number of very minor corrections (mainly spellings of phrases in minor clarifications of names). Otherwise it stands as he wrote it in his last few days in the colony — he resigned from the Sarawak Constabulary in 1949 & now back in the Australian Army.

T.H.

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