

This tape is compiled in August 1989 by Leonard Lindsay Cottee giving some personal experiences which took place in an operation called PYTHON while I was a member of this Special Unit.

The purpose of the operation was to land picked Army personnel from Borneo - the first Army personnel to be landed there after Japanese occupation -

August 1943 I was a Corporal Signaller in the 3rd Army Division based at Moogun, Queensland. The success of the Coral Sea Battle meant that the Armoured Division was no longer needed to defend Brisbane, various Units started picking Technical personnel from the Armoured Division. I was one of six selected by Lloyd Woods, he arrived at Milton tennis courts in Brisbane which had been taken over by the ~~WSDA~~ US Army and S.R.D. Australian Army.

I attended a School on Radio and Cipher, when the Course was finished Lt. Woods advised us that he was joining a party on a Special Mission and asked myself and another, Fred Olsen, to join him - in other words to volunteer - to go with him and other members of the party.

For the next three weeks, Major 'Gort' Chester and Captain Doug Broadhurst, British Army, Captain 'Paddy' O'Keefe, Lt. Lloyd Woods, Corporal Fred Olsen and Corporal Len Cottee, lived and trained together. Then I was given a weeks leave in Sydney and instructed to report to Melbourne. Olsen and I were then promoted to the Sergeant rank.

Major Gort Chester was a former Rubber Plantation Manager in Borneo who when the Second World War broke out he turned up in the Middle East and served in the Abyssinian Campaign and that's where he became a Major. He was sent out to join or work with 'Z' Special or Services Reconnaissance Department because of his knowledge of Borneo. Captain Broadhurst was a former Commissioner of Police in Malaya, he was joined to 'Z' Special Unit because of his knowledge of Borneo and the language.

We assembled ourselves in Melbourne and then loaded them on to a RAAF Dakata and flew across to Perth. On arrival, the US Navy collected our stores and we were taken by US Navy Staff cars to the Adelphi Hotel which had been taken over by the US Navy Officers for a Leave R&R while they were in Perth.

After three days as guests at the Adelphi Hotel, one night we boarded the US KINGFISH which was moored in Fremantle Harbour. It was then I was told we were going to Borneo, it came as quite a shock. However,

outside Fremantle we played hide and seek with a Dutch destroyer and could hear the propellers as they passed over us. When they made a successful run over us the crew of the sub. would fire a small smoke bomb to indicate that they had made a successful pass.

We then proceeded to Exmouth Gulf where we topped off the fuel tanks from a Dutch tanker, then on to Lombok Straits, we passed through there at night and they said they could see the lights of the Japanese airfield. We had to go through on the surface because there ~~was~~ was a very strong tide ~~tip~~ which ~~passes~~ passes through Lombok Straits which makes it difficult for submarines to get through there quickly underneath the surface.

The sub. then proceeded to the Celebes where they laid fifteen mines. We arrived at our destination alongside Borneo on the 5th October 1943.

I will now add some further information to 'Jumbo' Courtenays' notes.

Reference Folio 182. Olsen and I were in a six-man rubber boat fully loaded with stores and other members of the party were in two-man rubber boats. ~~Wee~~ The rubber boats were loaded on the deck of the submarine and when we were ready they lowered the submarine into the water so we could float off. The noise of the compressed air leaving the vents nearly blew us off the submarine - or rather, scared the daylights out of us!

We paddled away from the submarine however the tide rip quickly pulled us apart, our boat being more heavily laden we couldn't keep up with the other two boats so we tied the boats together and paddled ashore in ~~that~~ manner.

When we arrived at the beach we unloaded the stores and because it had started to rain we turned the large rubber boat upside down and huddled under it. We didn't get any sleep that night, we were cold and wet and Gort produced a flask of rum and gave us all enough to keep us warm.

Folio 183. The next night, settling down for some sleep, on the edge of the jungle next to the beach, we were amazed at the hundreds of fireflies flying around underneath the undergrowth, giving the area a dull glow bright enough to see one another.

Folio 186. Food we carried sealed in four gallon tins was sufficient for eighteen days per man. It consisted of dried mutton, dried onions, dried potatoes, dried carrots, rice, milk, tea, coffee, salt, pepper, sugar, curry powder, chocolate, compressed dried fruit, tobacco, cigarette papers, matches, Army biscuits, etc. etc.



We lived on this food for about nine months however the last ~~four~~ months we were on quarter rations.

Folio 187. Paddy O'Keefe and myself had the worst attack of malaria which we finally overcame with large doses of quinine.

Paddy O'Keefe and I, feeling very weak, were walking through the jungle when a large orangutang followed for about half an hour by jumping from tree to tree almost above us.. Paddy assured me he would not attack us provided we didn't walk into his lair where the young ones were. However I wasn't very happy about having this large animal almost overhead all the time and kept my Austen sub-machine gun at the ready all the time.

Folio 188. Lt. Valera spoke good English, and had a fine singing voice and entertained us when we ~~bedded down in our~~ hammocks for the night when he was with us. He had a young boy with him who helped him in the sailing boat and one day I watched this young fellow ~~kill~~ a small shark with a piece of wood in about three feet of water. He cut the shark up into thin strips and dried it in the sun. His food, and Lt. Valera's, consisted of fish and cassava which was tapioca root.

On one of the ~~excursions~~ when Gort, Valera, his boy helper and myself were crossing the Sulu Straits, we sailed into a Jap convoy of ships. Gort and I climbed under the floorboards of the boat amongst the stinking fish while a Jap low-flying <sup>two-winged???</sup> engine reconnaissance plane flew overhead. Close enough over the tops of us that we could see pilot and the gunner through the cracks in the floorboards. We told our crew to wave madly and appear friendly. Then we sailed past the the big troops ships and were close enough to see the Jap soldiers lining the rails and even hear them talking. We were very relieved when we <sup>finally</sup> passed those ships.

Folio 189. One day Broadhurst and O'Keefe and myself were hiding in the undergrowth on the edge of the beach watching a native sailing boat anchored in the bay, a large wild boar came walking along the beach. He poked his head and ~~green~~ long tusks into our hideout, Paddy O'Keefe grabbed his Austen sub-machine gun and pointed it at the boar and we all froze, fortunately the boar moved on after a startled look at us. We did not want to have to shoot as this would have alerted the natives in the boat. After the board had gone Paddy explained how dangerous these wild pigs ~~could~~ be.

I was up our look-out platform in a high tree overlooking the coast a few days after Brandis had become lost and a Japanese slow-flying reconnaissance plane making a reconnaissance along the beach flew past, I

took as much cover as I could because ~~the~~ plane was so close I could see both the observer and the pilot quite clearly.

Another day we saw the Jap marines come ashore, they came in smaller boat from their larger boat and they had some natives with them who piggy-backed them onto the beach so they wouldn't get their boots wet. They discovered some of our stores and through a telescope we saw them (and fieldglasses) opening the packs and one of our ~~shaps~~ said 'He's got my spare set of false teeth!'

We also watched their antics, they would practise sword fighting on the beach.. They would come ashore of a morning and carry out searching always return to their boat of a night, never sleeping on land. Incidentally, the whole nine months I was in Borneo I never slept in any other shelter than an American Army jungle hammock which had a water-proof top and zip fastened sides. I remember on one occasion when one of our chaps took off his boots in preparation to getting into his hammock he happened to tread onto some fire ants and he took one dive into his hammock and twisting around and he couldn't untangle himself until we came to his rescue. These fire ants, when they bite it is just like red hot needles going into you.

Then one morning they landed quite close to our Coast-watching camp and I radioed straight away of their arrival, we packed up and cleared out as they came ashore and we disappeared into the jungle to rendezvous at a pre-arranged place.

Later Gort told us that he had instructed Rudwick and Mackenzie to be on the look out or guard part of the way down to the beach while they dismantled the main radio camp. After it was dismantled and the others went on their way to the pre-arranged rendezvous, Gort went down to collect Rudwick and Mackenzie however they had disappeared from where he had left them or told them to wait, he then returned to the old main radio camp to find the Japs had already arrived and were digging up our empty food tins which we had carefully hidden underneath the undergrowth and buried in the ground and covered with leaves.

Well then we took off and we all met up later without Rudwick and Mackenzie. We never saw them again.

When we first set up our main radio camp, to make it easier for us to find our way back and forwards to the beach, we blazed a trail that is, cut a nick out of the bark in each tree in a straight line so we could find our way through the undergrowth. This meant we went up and down over the ridges and in the gullies it was very thick and dense with Lawyer vine



vine and growth where up on top of the ridges it was only light growth light forest. I found after making a few trips that the animals preferred to go round on the top of the ridges where it was easy walking and although it took a little longer to get to the beach we found we could go much quicker following the ridges.

These lawyer vines, up in Borneo we called them 'wait a while' they are a very strong vine covered in hooks and when we would walk into them they would rip your clothing, cut your skin and it was very difficult to get yourself out of them.

We were greatly troubled with leeches, every time we'd stop and some of the chaps would have a smoke, they would be busy putting the hot end of the cigarette onto the leech to make them drop off and every night when we would take off our boots our feet would be covered in blood from the leeches that had been active around our ankles and dropped off.

Folio 187. I remember one late afternoon walking along the beach Stan and I and myself of the jungle near the ocean and we decided to take a short cut across the shallow bay. We were walking about two feet of water when we spotted a sea snake swimming towards us, Stan pulled out his revolver and I pulled out a large jungle knife but Stan wanted to have a shot with his revolver, however, at that very moment there was a terrific explosion behind us and we looked round to see a great column of black smoke rising over the horizon. We turned back to deal with the snake however it had swum past us. The next day the beach was covered in small dead fish about seven inches thick and there were thousands of them, the explosion from the ship which had been torpedoed must have killed all these fish and in a few days the stench along the beach was dreadful. We had to move inland to enable us to breathe freely.

Another occasion we were at the Main Raedda Camp, it was late in the afternoon just before dark, and we heard elephants come crashing through the jungle towards us. Gort instructed us to climb the largest tree we could find and we stayed up these trees until the noise had passed. Fortunately the elephants had gone along another ridge.

Next day we went over and had a look and we could see how they had trampled the jungle.

On another occasion we were walking through the jungle we came across a large python curled up asleep which we left alone. Although there were plenty of monkeys around there were also baboons, sort of monkeys without any tail, these were also very agile tree climbers and could jump from branch to branch and they would also, if we weren't around, venture

into the camp and try and take off with anything they could get their little fingers onto. It was great entertainment to watch their antics up the trees. The monkeys would get used to us if we were just sitting around and weren't moving much they didn't worry about us but if anyone approached or if a boat came in close to the coast they would chatter and take off like a flock of birds. In fact they were fairly good watchdogs for us.

On one of Gort's visits to the Islands he brought back two hens which kept as ~~pet~~ and also of course for the eggs which they produced, these of course were a luxury for us. One night after dark we would always put a leg rope on the hens and put them up on a perch and one night there was quite a lot of noise coming from the hens and we went to investigate and there was a wild cat had bitten the head off one of them, so we had some chicken next day. Another occasion I remember we were sitting around playing cards and this wild cat would come up and you could see the eyes in the darkness and Rudwick was ready with his revolver and with one quick shot he put it between the eyes - he was a very good revolver shot.

When we finally left the main radio camp and were heading for a rescue-pickup point we carried the lone hen with us and whoever carried her that day had the egg to eat. On two occasions I had a double yolk which caused a lot of discussion because the fellow that carried her the previous day said he should have had a share of the egg. Our job in looking after the hen on that day was to give it some of our biscuit and find it worms beneath the undergrowth.

When we first arrived in BORNEO it was the wet season, and it rained every day with regular clockwork, it would commence raining at about midday for two to three hours it would fall out of the sky, we got quite used to it and later on in the dry season it hardly rained much at all. We all grew beards, there was a pair of scissors amongst us with which we trimmed one another's hair and our beards a little bit, it was not until we were on the rescue submarine, the US HARDER, that we had our first shave and unfortunately if I'd know they were taking photos next day I would have left my beard on however I'd taken it off and left a bit of a moustache in place.

Folio 196. I remember we tried to obtain a pickup by the US REDFIN - we had carried our large rubber boat down to the beach and we had erected a white sheet up just before dark so they could find what part of the coast we were on and we waited and the first indication that something was wrong was gunfire and a fight took place between REDFIN's crew and a Japanese patrol boat and we realised that our pickup had blown and



and we wouldn't be leaving Borneo that night so we waited until dawn and then we ~~heard~~ Japanese coming ashore and we took off into the jungle as fast as we could, none of us looking at our compasses, and after about half an hour we found we were almost back on the beach again, which we turned around and used our compasses and headed inland. Not long after we heard a Jap calling out thinking we were some of his mates crashing through the jungle and he was chasing us either that or he was trying to - I don't know what his idea was of calling out - but he was trying to attract our attention I think. We took off so fast and exhausted ourselves after about quarter of an hour we just sat down and got our breath back and then got into a small creek and paddled up this creek for quite a way so as not leave any footprints or marks for the Japanese to follow us.

The rubber boat had been abandoned at the beach and we never came back to ~~claim~~ that again.

Folio 196 - Alex Chew's relating to attempting our third pickup point with the submarine - we were walking along single file in this shallow water so as not to leave any footprints when these Japanese jumped us and they started firing at us and that's when Stan Neil and Phil Olsen raced straight into the jungle and the other four of us went to a different section and we lost them. Stan Neil related later that he fired his Aussen sub-machine gun off first and he nearly shot his foot off (we or he??)

Folio 198 where Alex Chew is describing our final pick up. We were almost out of food, Stan Neil and Fred Olsen had spent nearly a day to try and find some water to drink and had brought back a couple gallons of brackish water, we had eaten some dried mutton and a few dried beans that day and had stomach pains from the dried food swelling up in our stomachs.

When Bill Jenkins told us to get moving and come out to the folboat we took a fair while to climb through the mud and Fred Olsen was so weak and couldn't make it, he was only half way out when we were all at the folboat and Stan Dodd went in and dragged him out.

When we were all aboard with only a couple of inches of freeboard on either side, the little boats were overloaded, we started up the outboard motors on them and the one I was in the motor stopped and Stan Dodd found it was out of petrol it had evidently leaked out as they paddled in. So the other folboat took us in tow and I said to Stan Dod, 'How are we going to find the submarine?' and he said, 'We're steering for that bright star'. Anyhow after about half an hour he puts up a sheet of tin off the end of a stick and told us that they had some new gadget on the submarine that they would be able to find us instead of us trying to find them.

It turned out that this submarine had only recently been fitted with the radar, only for that they would never have found us because we were being swept across the bay with the current and the submarine had moved quite a considerably distance to meet us.

As we loomed up closely to the submarine which was submerged almost to the deck level the conning tower looked like some sort of a boat and Bill Jenkins said to Stan Dodd, ~~'Man the tommy guns'~~ and 'Man the tommy guns' and I laughed at this, however he manned the tommy guns, they each had a tommy gun with them, and we pulled alongside the submarine much to our relief, we were helped aboard, hustled down below and had our first hot shower in nine months - that was real luxury. They gave us clean clothing to put on and we had our first meal which consisted of steak and eggs, strawberries and icecream, fresh bread and fresh cake and that was a very much enjoyed meal.

I've thought of some more comments perhaps I should have put in earlier about the conditions ~~we~~ we were in just before we were picked up. Our clothing was all rotted and falling off us, ~~in~~ our boots were rotted and they were falling ~~in~~ to bits, we were on quarter rations, we'd all lost about ~~three~~ three stone weight each, the ones, there were four of them who smoked and Olsen and myself didn't smoke, we traded chocolate for tobacco, when they ran out of cigarettes and tobacco they were very cranky and irritable, and a couple of days before we were picked up we were rather dispirited and depressed and Gort sort of came round to each one of us individually and spoke to us on our own and he asked me would I shoot him if the Japs caught us and I said No I wouldn't shoot him he would have to that himself I said he could my 'L' pill - when we went on this Expedition we were all issued with capsules of potassium cyanide - you were to bite the capsule and about three to four seconds that's about all you live after you've bitten it - a very quick death. I had told told him I had sewn my pill into the lapel of my shirt so if I did need it it was available but that at stage I had no desire or intention of biting that rubber capsule.

The next morning after being picked up I shaved my beard - ~~most~~ Olsen and I shaved our beards ~~of them had shaved their~~ beards off - if I'd known we were going to be photographed I would have left it on. I mentioned a little earlier in the tape about our boots rotting off I didn't mention they were the American canvas and rubber boot being used up there in Borneo, very serviceable before they rotted. I also had mentioned that we were equipped with Austen sub-machine guns, they only carried two magazines of bullets, each magazine had 28 bullets in it.



We should have had a game rifle with us because I often saw deer and pigs in the jungle and we could have supplemented our rations with fresh meat. The only occasion, apart from the chicken we ate, when we had fresh meat was when I shot a pig, he was about a half pound porker and I'd had a wild shot before and missed so this time I put the Austen on automatic and I gave it a burst of about four or five shots and I shot him right in the forehead, the pig was still kicking when I bent over a sappling and tied his hoofs to it and had him hanging there and gutted him and skinned him and carried him back to the camp where we boiled the meat in one of our food tins and Olsen and myself had quite a meal. Most of the other chaps were away from the camp at that stage, they were on a recce to the north to find a suitable place for our final pickup.

On another occasion I happened to be walking along the beach just outside from where our coast watching camp was and I happened to see a log of wood which was about 20 ft long and about 6 inches diameter and I thought I'd lift up one end of it to see if I could drag it into camp to use as a bit of firewood and when I picked it up I found it was so light I could balance it on my fingers and I walked into camp with this great log on my finger and making a joke of how strong I was and the other fellows were quite surprised to see such a log of wood balanced on my finger. I found ~~xxxxx~~ out it was a log of balsa.

The morning following our rescue the diving alarm sounded - I woke up and smelt the fresh food that had just been baked while we were on the surface during the night and as the fellows from up on the ~~deck~~<sup>outer</sup> deck came inside I asked them what was the problem and they said apparently there was an aeroplane coming at us from out of the morning sun and that's why we dived. Eventually three bombs landed close to us but didn't do any damage.

We then proceeded north to the Philippines and a few days later ~~we~~ the Captain announded over the loudspeaker system that he had spotted an aircraft carrier and he said we'll see if we can sink it. However there must have been planes flying around and his next announcement was that we had been spotted and there were two destroyers heading in our direction. The next thing I knew was that we felt the three torpedoes being fired, ~~they are fired with~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ the compressed air, and a certain shudder goes through the submarine as they leave, immediately the torpedoes ~~leave the submarine~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ are fired the crew all look at their watches to check the time the torpedoes are running, after a certain time if they miss their target they automatically blow up, this is a safety measure because they have been known to go off course and come back and be quite dangerous to the submarine that fired

them. However one of the torpedoes hit the destroyer which we could  
it by now, we could hear the propellers coming towards us and there  
was a terrific explosion. By this time we were diving quite sharply  
and then we heard the propellers go over the top of us and there was  
a terrific explosion, the ship evidently blowing up, which sent everybody  
to the floor of the submarine, water started pouring in in places and  
the crew were running around caulking various places, shutting valves  
and opening other valves and we could hear a mighty roar through the  
submarine, it was a cracking sound like a violent thunderstorm, the  
crackling became similar to steam being released into ~~back of the boiler~~  
a bucket of water but amplified millions of times and making a tremendous  
evidently the destroyers boilers were belching steam into the ocean  
as she sank.

The sub was tossed around like a cork and everybody was  
struggling to get off the floor after being thrown down. I was sitting  
opposite Stan Neil in the Mess Quarters and he told me after that I was  
as white as a sheet and I said he was white as a sheet too. One of the  
Negro crewmen, he was on his first trip, he got down on his knees and  
he had his hands together praying and they couldn't shift him during the  
two hours that they were being depth charged.

We dived to 450 feet and this particular sub -this particular  
type of sub - was tested to go for 300 feet. At the the 400 ft. depth  
the hull continually creaked and crack and groaned and we could tell  
there was tremendous pressure on it. In the Control Room they had a  
bathosphere and the stylus tracked a short horizontal line on its lamp  
black card at round the 200 ft. level as we dived so the Captain brought  
the sub up to this warm water current at this level which helped reflect  
the enemy echos ranging. ~~We~~ We removed our shoes, the air conditioning  
was turned off, everybody was warned to be very quiet and even not to  
raise their voice, with no air conditioning during that two hours and such  
a lot of electrical cabling in the submarine made it very hot and everybody  
was dripping with perspiration. We spent a very anxious two hours with  
propellers coming and going and depth charges getting louder and receding.  
It was quite an experience, ~~very~~ rather hard on the nerves. We eventually  
~~sur~~ surfaced when it was dark however the Captain was able to see a lot  
of wreckage on the surface of the ocean.

On another occasion later at night we were on the surface and we  
pulled alongside a sister submarine and the Captains were able to talk  
to each other across the water and at a later stage our Captain took his



submarine in close to a breakwater so he could stick his periscope up and look into a harbour and see how many Japanese ships were there and we spent some time looking around poking around the area and then we headed back to Darwin having run out of torpedoes.

When we went into Darwin Harbour the crew took out all the pennants of all the ships they'd sunk, I think there were 21 that day and most of the crew that weren't on duty came up on deck as we cruised into the harbour.

We stayed in Darwin for a few days confined to camp for debriefing and then were flown to Adelaide where it being the middle of winter we nearly froze. Fortunately they were able to supply us with some heavy greatcoats and we went aboard a train to proceed to Melbourne and when we arrived in Melbourne we were met by our top Commanding Officers, I remember there was a Navy Officer, an Army Officer and an Air Force Officer. We were then taken to staff cars and given some spending money.....

#### SIDE TWO

.....I don't know whether I made a mistake when I said the other members of the party were in two-man rubber boats, they were in four-man rubber boats because they were piled up with a fair amount of stores, the six-man rubber boat which carried such a lot of other stuff

Another thing I didn't mention was that the Americans with us up on deck when we were crossing the Equator and they sounded the diving alarm, I don't know whether you know the size of the manhole which goes in to the inner conning tower, it's not very big, but there is a vertical ladder just inside and everybody has to come down so fast you don't come down the ladder you just grab hold of it and jump and there's two sailors down below who catch you and pull you out of the way to come in. We had to come in very quickly because we could see the submarine was in a dive and the last man in had to shut the hatch. We got our certificates for crossing the Equator in that fashion.

I hope this recording of mine will be of some help to you.

Bye for now.