

Special Operations Australia 1943

INTRODUCTION - This paper provides the barest of outlines of four special operations in 1943 and cannot do justice to the detail of those operations or indeed to give anything the briefest explanation of the byzantine world of Allied intelligence organisations and circumstances.

I have leaned heavily and directly on Alan Powell's *War by Stealth*, G.B. Courtney's *Silent Feet*, Peter Ryan's *Fear Drives My Feet* to inform this paper.

In this paper four special operations in 1943 will be briefly described – one a terrible disaster (LAGARTO – in Timor), another a magnificent success (JAYWICK – in Singapore) and two which were forerunners of other successful missions in the following years (MOSSTROOPS in New Guinea and PYTHON in North Borneo).

STRUCTURE - In a re-organisation of the former Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD) in March 1943, Special Operations Australia (SOA) was born.

The former ISD had been rift by inter service and inter-Allied rivalries and intrigues, not least over funding and control. With its HQ in Melbourne, ISD also competed with two other special operations organisations in 1942 – the Far Eastern Liaison Organisation (FELO), responsible for propaganda and Secret Intelligence Australia (SIA) responsible for the collection of secret intelligence. These three organisations were expected to operate independently but again these arrangements were not satisfactory and in July 1942 a new organisation – the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) replaced ISD.

The organization of the AIB was four sections:

A – SOA

B - SIS

C -Combined Field Intelligence Service and

D - Military Propaganda

AIB's mission, inter alia, was defined as 'to obtain and report information of the enemy in the SW Pacific Area, exclusive of Australia and in addition, where practicable, to weaken the enemy by sabotage and destruction of morale'. The Americans controlled the finances, and the Allied commanders controlled transport, supply and so on. Additionally, the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) also had controlling connections to parts of the organisation, while the personalities of Supreme Commander SWPA American General Douglas MacArthur, the interests of the Australian Dutch and American Allies in intelligence collection all made it a minefield in which to actually plan and carry out practical and successful operations in pursuit of AIB's mission.

In March 1943 the AIB was again reorganised with SOA adopting the cover name Services Reconnaissance Department or SRD. The tasks of SRD were:

1. Obtaining information of the enemy and his activities . Intended mainly for work outside of the SWPA

2. Execution of subversive and highly specialised sabotage chiefly by means of undercover methods.

OPERATION LAGARTO – TIMOR - Although the Allies had no intention to re-occupy Timor, SRD needed an operation to get underway to demonstrate activity. Following the withdrawal of the last of the AIF Independent Companies, in early 1942 the SRD had begun operations in Timor under the codename LIZARD. Small parties were landed in Timor successively (LIZARD II in September) to collect intelligence and organise a resistance but in the face of increasingly brutal Japanese reprisals against local Timorese who helped them. In November LIZARD III arrived but along with the other teams came under Japanese attacks on their camps through January 1943.

The three successive LIZARD observation and guerrilla parties inserted from early 1942, were unsuccessful in collecting intelligence or developing a local resistance organisation to the Japanese. When the last LIZARD party was pulled out in July 1943 by three Navy Fairmile launches, the LAGARTO intelligence team had already landed by US submarine on the south coast of Timor. The party consisted of 8 Portuguese SRD operatives, joined by an Australian sergeant who was to be liaison and signaller. However, by late September, LAGARTO was on the verge of annihilation. In a Japanese ambush the party was dispersed, and several were captured including the leader and most important, the Australian radio operator.

He suffered torture, broke and operated the radio for the Japanese re-establishing contact with SRD. Despite signal indicators that security had been compromised, SRD did not notice, and then inserted a new party of five (COBRA) which the Japanese were waiting for; they were captured on the beach in January 1944 as they landed. The party leader, an Australian Captain, was also forced to operate his radio for the Japanese and SRD again ignored all the signs that the missions had been compromised. The LAGARTO one way 'radio game' continued almost until the end of the war with more parties (COBRA, SUNCOB) captured and their members killed or who died in captivity. The extent of the disaster was hushed up but after the war, the full impact of the compromised security was revealed, including the extent of the Japanese reprisals against the Timorese.

OPERATION MOSSTROOPS – NEW GUINEA

After 12 months of Japanese occupation, the natives had accepted that they were here to stay and in their own interests would not help white troops. The Japanese were also now patrolling inland from their coastal bases. By early 1943 with a number of parties with ANGAU, FELO and AIB leaders, were eliminated or withdrawn, and yet with pending ground operations against Lae, Salamaua, Wewak and Madang, the need for intelligence grew. Allied sigint could tell that Japanese reinforcements were arriving but not their dispositions.

Operation MOSSTROOPS was the response, with men recruited for the operation from Z Special Unit (SRD's administrative unit). The aim was to arm and train the aggressive tribesmen of the Middle Sepik to operate as partisans under white leadership. But, from the beginning, MOSSTROOPS went wrong. An advance party of 28 was flown in by Catalina on 9

August but they were almost immediately attacked by the Japanese and were forced to walk out to safety. Another advance party in another area, inserted on 6th September by Catalina, met the same fate and had to retreat out to safety.

However, MOSSTROOPS went on - by October the balance of MOSSTROOPS had been flown and installed at several bases further north within 30 km of the Sepik/Yellow River junction. There were numerous clashes with Japanese troops and despite two further parties of reinforcements – about 55 reinforcements from Port Moresby - Japanese attacks intensified. Allied GHQ closed down the Operation. On 20 December 1943 American aircraft evacuated the whole force of 102 European soldiers and 128 natives. The operation at least showed that no amount of force, other than a full-scale invasion, was likely to keep the Japanese out of areas where Allied power could threaten their north coast lifeline.

MOSSTROOPS drew Japanese attention to the middle Sepik region and forced out AIB and ANGAU parties that otherwise might have been able to stay. SRD learned valuable logistics and recruiting lessons, but the complex and conflicting command and control aspects of AIB continued to bedevil operational planning, especially given the general scepticism of some in Allied HQ regarding special operations.

OPERATION JAYWICK – SINGAPORE - In many respects JAYWICK is the best known of the SRD's operations during the war and has been the subject of several books. It was a spectacular success, especially when contrasted with its 1944 successor RIMAU, which ended in catastrophic disaster. JAYWICK, the brainchild of Major Ivan Lyon who had escaped from Singapore in 1942 to Ceylon in a native boat – he had been posted to SOE's 'Oriental Mission' in Singapore. Lyon conceived of a raid on Japanese shipping in Singapore harbour under cover of an ex-Japanese fishing boat – now named *Krait* - which had come to Australia via India after being used to escape Singapore in 1942.

With a carefully picked crew of 12 sailors and soldier operatives, the *Krait* left Exmouth Gulf in WA for the small islands close to Singapore. It safely arrived and launched the operatives in folboats and limpet mines. They were able to enter and leave Singapore harbour undetected, sank 40,000 tons of enemy shipping. but faced a 50 kilometre paddle to reach *Krait* with the Japanese conducting a frenzied, if unsuccessful, search for the saboteurs. *Krait* again managed to return to Australia in October 1943.

'JAYWICK was indeed one of the great special operations of the war, a triumph for boldness, courage, hard training and meticulous preparation.' And luck. Unfortunately, the reprisals against the people of Singapore, suspected of aiding the raid, were brutal. And a second raid planned for 1944 to emulate JAYWICK ended in abysmal failure, with all 23 on that raid to die at Japanese hands, including Lieutenant-Colonel Lyons.

OPERATION PYTHON – NORTH BORNEO - In May 1943 it was decided to put a SRD party into North Borneo contact local natives and obtain intelligence on Japanese activity, installations and shipping movements. It was also to prepare the ground for a campaign of sabotage and

resistance when progress in the war allowed it. In September 1943, a mixed party of 6 British and Australian operatives landed on the east coast of Borneo near Labian Point by USS (submarine) *Kingfish*. It erected a radio station about 5 miles inland from the chosen landing beach and made contact with Darwin, 1500 miles away, in early November.

The party then made contact with American-led guerrillas in the southern Philippines and set up several coast watch posts between Tawi-Tawi and their hideout in northern Borneo. Several Australians had joined the Americans after successfully escaping Japanese captivity in Sandakan – they would re-unite with SRD in Borneo in 1945.

A second party of 6 Australians (PYTHON 2) joined the first PYTHON party in January 1944. Led by two who had escaped from Ambon in 1942. PYTHON 2's role was to organise guerrilla warfare in the area. One of the party was captured by the Japanese (later executed). With the Japanese now alerted, PYTHON was forced to move, evacuating some to Australia by submarine, while two more operatives were captured and executed by the Japanese. The balance of the party was evacuated by submarine in mid-44.

During the operation 88 enemy shipping movements had been transmitted and over 500 enemy troops tied up in searching for the small PYTHON teams. However, it was on the west coast of Borneo that SRD would hit its stride with highly successful operations, SEMUT 1-4. PYTHON's approach to the north-west coast was a response to keen interest in the approaches to the Philippines at that time.

SUMMARY - The role of the AIB in SWPA was always the gleaning of strategic and tactical intelligence. guerrilla warfare and rescue of Allied servicemen was secondary. However, SRD often placed special operations before the great need of GHQ for information. This essential conflict led to the conclusion after the war that SRD's leaders isolated the organisation, misused Blamey's gift of open access to Australian military resources in building a private army that trained good men for ultimate disillusion or sent them to failure in wildcat ventures, capitalised on the euphoria created by JAYWICK to build still wilder fantasies, betrayed their chosen men and the people of Timor to save their own skins, and lied to and cheated their legitimate commanders until even Blamey and SOE withdrew their support.

Overall, 1943 was a year of great frustrations, some disasters (e.g, LAGARTO), big learning curves (e.g., MOSSTROOPS and PYTHON) and the great success of the JAYWICK raid.

Despite the criticism after the war, the courage, endurance and daring of the men who fought a ruthless enemy in largely forgotten operations among the jungles and mountains of SWPA throughout the war, should be remembered.

Special Operations Australia

as

Services Reconnaissance Department

1943

Operations

LIZARD/LAGARTO

Timor

JAYWICK

Singapore

MOSSTROOPS

New Guinea

PYTHON

North Borneo

Reorganisation of Special Operations/Secret Intelligence and Propaganda late 1942

SOE – Special Operations Executive

AIB - Allied Intelligence Bureau

SOA – Special Operations Australia

SRD – Services Reconnaissance Department
(1943-45 Cover name for SOA)

FELO – Far East Liaison Office

ANGAU – Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit
Coastwatchers & SIS

Operations LIZARD & LAGARTO – Timor

LIZARD – a 1942 operation absorbed into LAGARTO
in early 1943

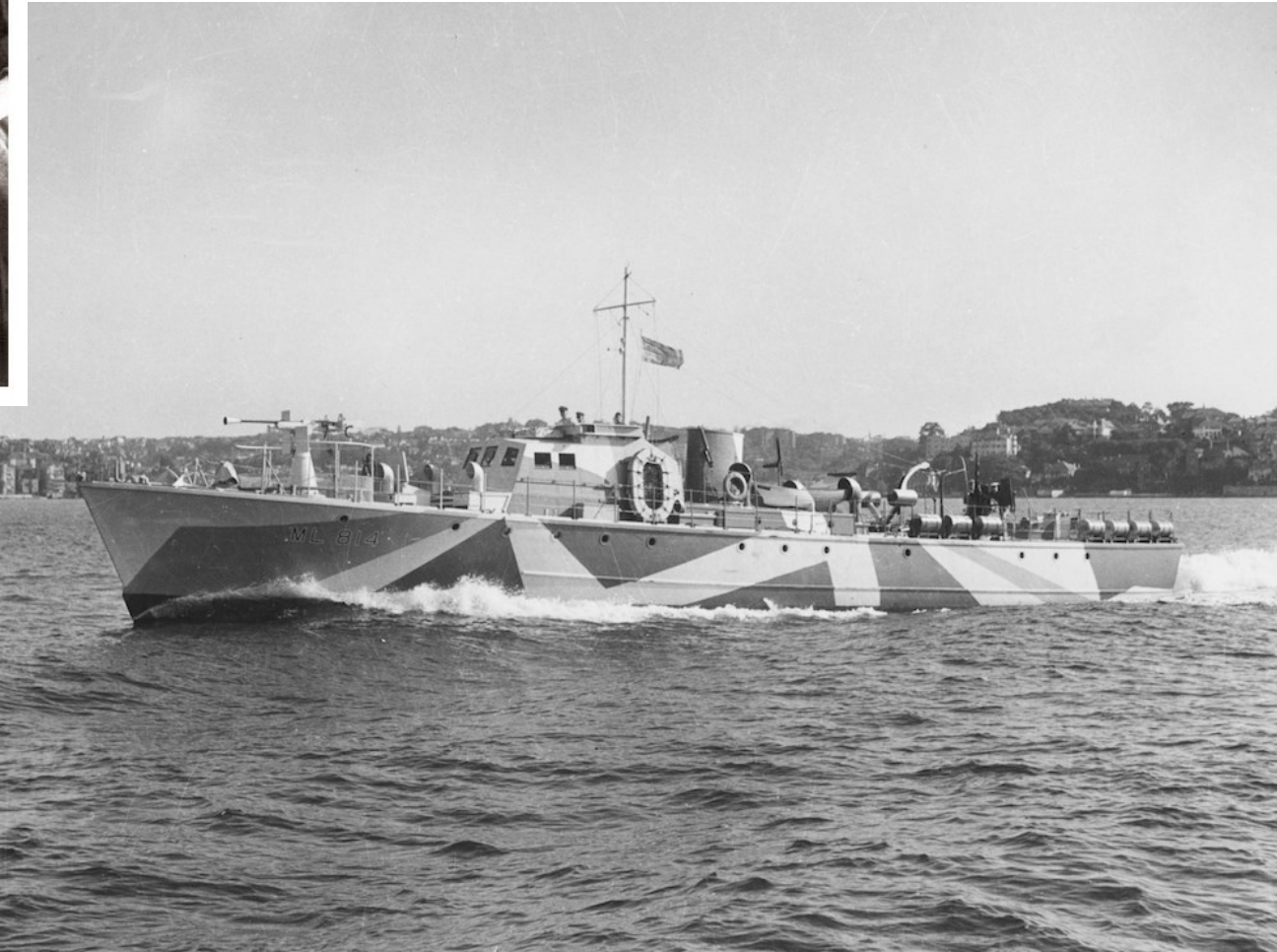
LAGARTO – extended to three operations of that name
through 1944

Eventually a disaster as the Japanese had played a radio
game with SRD after capturing a LAGARTO 1 radio op

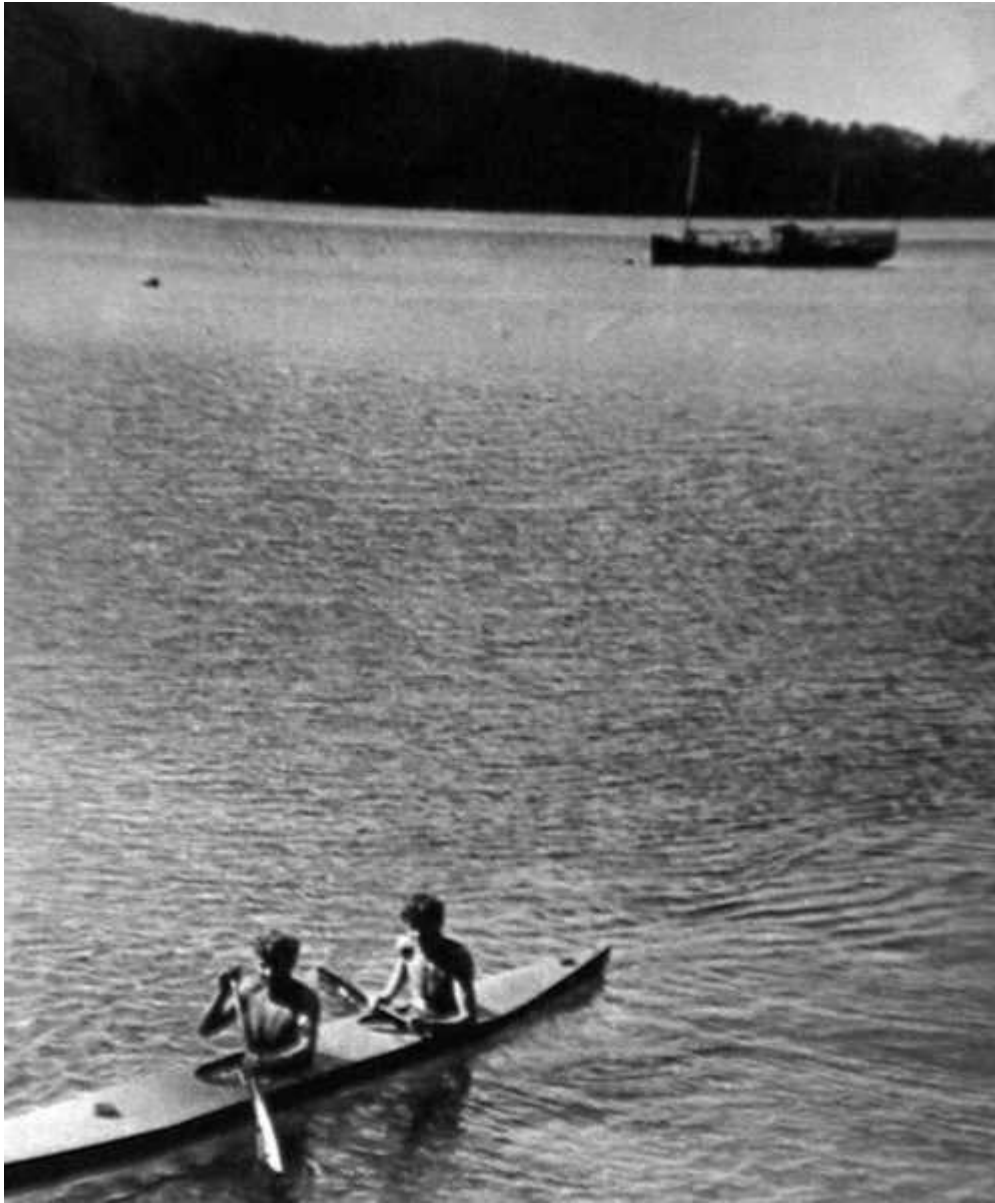
LAGARTO



Japanese soldiers at Dili, East Timor



JAYWICK



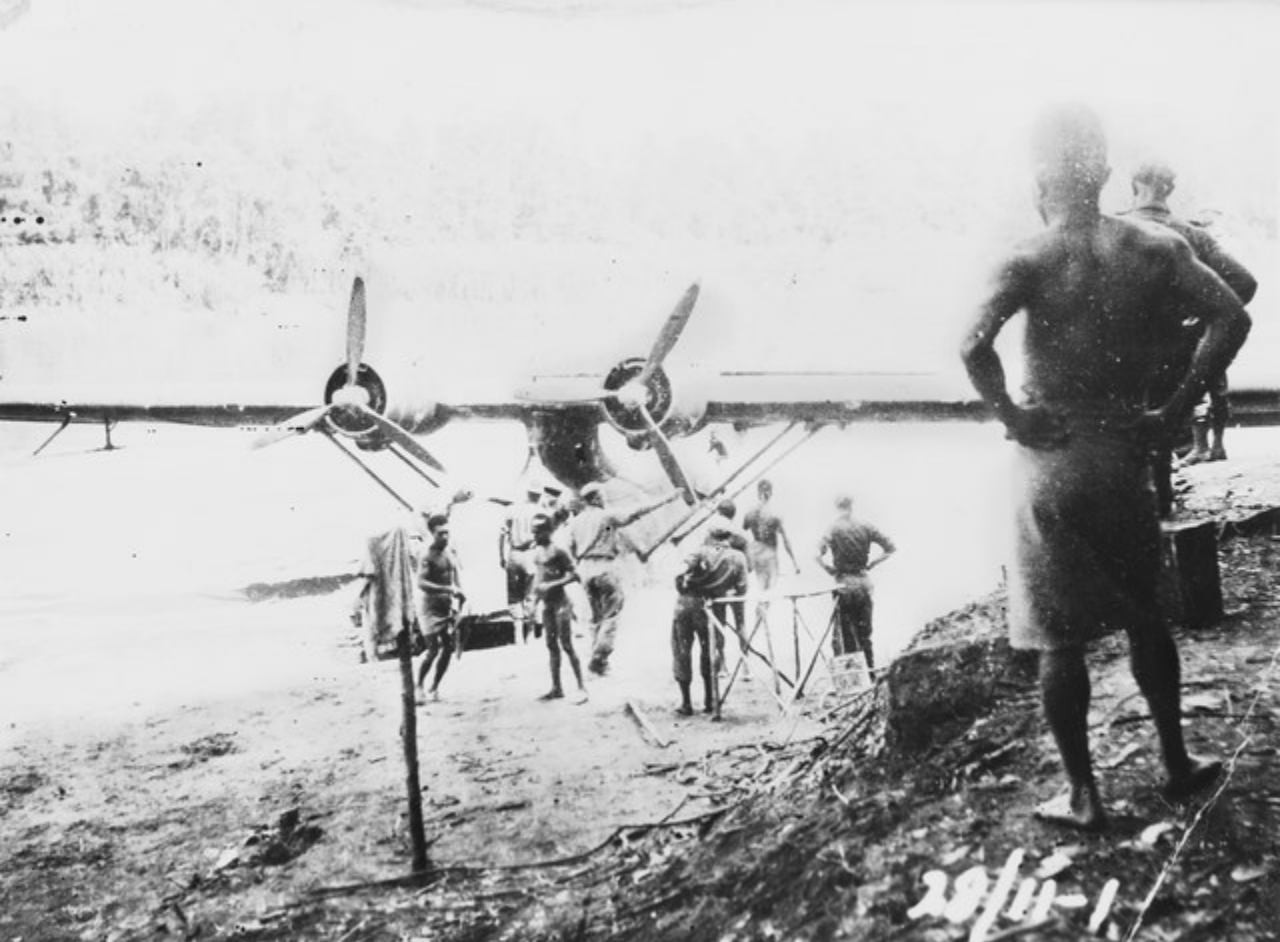
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

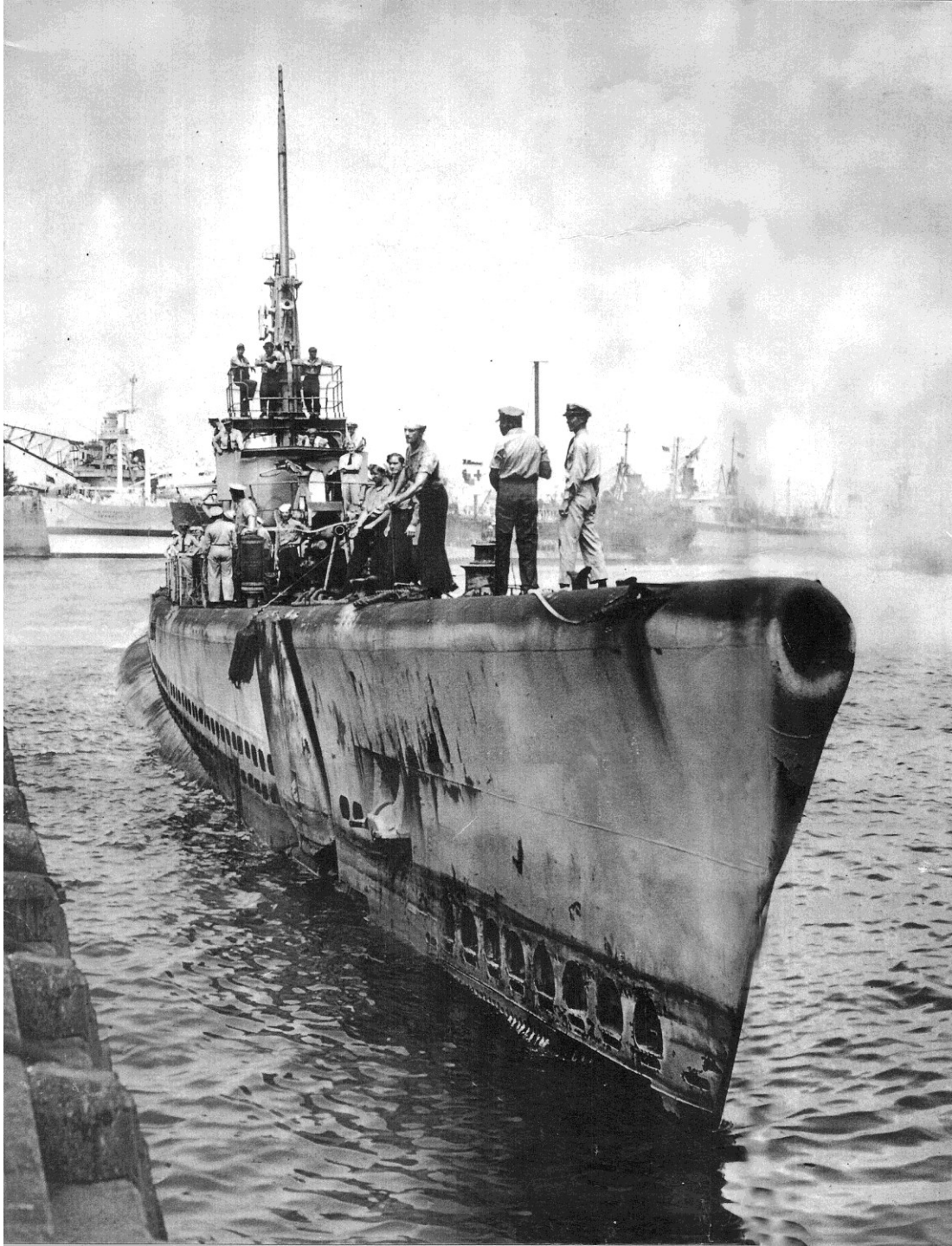
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17 January 1943 - Camp X Refuge Bay NSW, MV Krait sits at Rear as Folboat Teams Practice their Canoeing Skills inside the Secluded Refuge Bay in NSW.



MOSSTROOPS





PYTHON

Special Operations Australia/SRD

- 1943 a year of frustration, disasters, a steep learning curve and a big success (though strategically insignificant).
- Intelligence gathering vs kinetic operations conflicted planning
- Need for friendly local support an absolute necessity
- Japanese counter operations and brutal reprisals against locals shut down many operations.
- ISD/AIB - SRD planned 273 operations 1942-1945 – only 71 were carried out.