

For once it was lucky the enemy tanker didn't sink but drifted over the horizon. Broadhurst said they later learned the tanker eventually did sink and that *Kingfish* survived the destroyer's attack.

The Z unit didn't know it, but they had landed just a few days after the success of another Z unit's Operation Jaywick attack on ships in Singapore harbour. While the pants were drying in northern **Borneo**, off Borneo's southern coast the *Krait* was picking up the commandos who'd mounted the dangerous mission.

Chester's unit loaded their heavy gear into rubber boats and paddled inland up a river hoping the alarmed fishermen hadn't given their presence away. Their task, dubbed Operation Python, was a bold one – to make contact with local warriors to form a tribal resistance guerilla force to harass the Japanese. The fact that the Dayak tribe of **Borneo** were headhunters certainly added spice to the mission, but whose heads would end up hanging outside the tribal huts?

It turned out their worst enemy wasn't a band of headhunters or Japanese patrols but the jungle itself. It was tough going hacking through jungle and after five days they'd only managed to get eight kilometres inland. Within days they started falling sick. By the fifth day only the veteran among them – Paddy O'Keefe – was able to keep working. The radio malfunctioned almost immediately, ruined by damp that seeped into everything. They were in low country and found it impossible to erect an antenna high enough to get a signal from Darwin 3000 kilometres away. They were missing axes and climbing equipment to get up the fifty-metre-tall trees to spread the antenna, and it took five weeks before they could establish radio contact.

Over the next two months Chester and O'Keefe built up an intelligence network along the north and east coasts of tribal chiefs and Filipino partisans who'd been recruited by the US Army. They acted as both Coast Watchers and recruiters for tribal guerilla groups. In December, Chester made contact with the leader of a force of 2000 Chinese partisans operating in western **Borneo**. Chester gave him 2400 gold sovereigns and a promise of arms and ammunition, but it all came apart when a tribal chief turned on the hated Chinese, killing the leaders and taking the money.

In January 1944 a second Z Special Unit squad made up entirely of Australians arrived to reinforce the Python operation. **Python 2** included Major Bill Jenkins, Lieutenant Jack Rudwick, Warrant Officer Alec Chew and Sergeants Donald McKenzie, Stan Neil and William Brandis. They were to concentrate on organising guerilla bands to create havoc among Japanese forces in north-east **Borneo**.

Just a day after they landed, the three sergeants got lost in the jungle. Only Neil and McKenzie eventually staggered into the Python camp. Brandis, 23, from Meekatharra in Western Australia, didn't return. It was later learned he was found by local villagers who turned him over to the Japanese. The Japanese now knew an Australian commando force was operating in northern **Borneo** and they sent large patrols of up to 100 troops to hunt them down.

Another disaster hit **Python 2** in March when Rudwick, Chew, McKenzie and Neil were on a beach monitoring enemy ship movements. Rudwick ordered Chew and Neil to check another lookout point to the west while he and McKenzie headed east to a better spot. Several hours later Rudwick, 22, from Ballarat, and McKenzie, 21, from Wagin, Western Australia, were on a trail that led to the Python camp when they heard a Japanese patrol coming up behind them. The two young Australians knew they couldn't lead the enemy to their radio operation, so they slowed down until the Japanese spotted them, then led them on a chase away from the camp. When they got far enough away from the camp, Rudwick and McKenzie turned and attacked the Japanese patrol. They were both

wounded and overpowered. The Japanese wanted them alive for questioning. The commandos knew that the men in the Python camp would pack and leave as soon as they heard the gunfire. They had done their duty, protected the operation and saved their mates.

The two young commandos were tortured and imprisoned with Brandis. On 30 December 1944, as the tide of war was turning in the Allies' favour, the Japanese took the three Australian commandos from their prison cells, forced them to kneel in the dirt, raised their swords and beheaded them.

Major Jenkins also came close to a terrible end. The 32 year old from Melbourne was with his local guide when they had to cross a muddy creek. The guide told Jenkins to cross the creek first and then sprint up the bank on the other side. Jenkins did as he was told. On the river bank he turned around when he heard a loud smacking noise. He saw the guide clinging to an overhead branch lifting his legs high from the water swirling violently below him. The guide swung his way to the bank. Only then did he tell Jenkins it was a crocodile-infested creek.

'The crocodile always attacks the last person in a line crossing a stream so I sent you first because you are new to the jungle and wouldn't know what to do if attacked.'³ The guide didn't explain how the crocodile knew who was the last person to cross a creek.

With the Japanese closing in on them, HQ decided to evacuate the surviving Python team members. It took several attempts, with American submarines risking everything to surface close to shore with Japanese ships on high alert.

Jenkins was picked up by the submarine *USS Harder* and directed Commander Samuel Dealey to a new rendezvous point to pick up the rest of the Python team. Dealey was one of the most decorated submarine skippers in the US Navy and demonstrated his daring during the rescue of the Australian commandos. Jenkins was in for one hell of a ride.

Harder was on its way with Jenkins to the second rendezvous when Dealey saw a convoy of five enemy ships – two destroyers and three tankers. He was on the surface hunting the ships when a destroyer came up fast behind them. Dealey dived, and from a distance of 900 metres fired three torpedoes from the stern tubes. One slammed into the bow and a second hit right under the bridge. The Japanese destroyer went straight to the bottom with no survivors. A second destroyer rushed to the attack. Dealey fired six torpedoes. All missed. Dealey dived to the bottom and sat there as depth charges blew all around them.

Days later Dealey confronted another destroyer coming straight at them. The US skipper held his nerve. Closer and closer it came, zigzagging left then right to avoid a head-on torpedo. Dealey peered through the periscope calculating which way it would turn next. When it was just 600 metres away he snapped, 'Fire one, fire two, fire three!'⁴

Fifteen seconds later the first torpedo slammed into the destroyer amidships. The second blasted the stern. The third missed – but the damage was done. Still the ship came at the submarine. When it was 280 metres away the ship's magazine exploded. The shock wave threw *Harder* around, but it wasn't damaged. The fight wasn't over. The furious crew of a smaller sub chaser raced in and dropped depth charges. Dealey dived until the sub hit the sandy bottom, where she sat for two hours as explosions ripped all around them.

That night the sub surfaced and reached the rendezvous point where the Python team was waiting. It wasn't ideal. Heavy mud flats stretched out a long way. The commandos sank to their waists in mud as soon as they tried to wade out to the boats waiting to pick them up. They had to lie flat and crawl through the clinging stinking mud to reach the boats. They stripped off their muddy clothes and flopped exhausted into the boats. On board they were given the best present ever: hot showers and clean clothes. The Americans served steak, eggs, fresh vegetables and ice cream to the starving Australians, topped off with a shot of American whiskey. Medicinal, of course – the US Navy is dry.

The Python team's trip home was an exciting one. A few days later the sub passed a small enemy fleet protected by a string of destroyers. It was too tempting for Dealey. He was lining up one of the large tankers when a destroyer spotted the sub and came straight at them. Dealey had already killed two destroyers charging at him. Could he be lucky a third time? A destroyer coming straight at you offers a small target. When the range closed to 1300 metres, Dealey fired three torpedoes and ordered a rapid dive turning to port. The sound of the destroyer's spinning propellers at full speed was getting louder and louder.

Major Jenkins later wrote of what happened: 'We had submerged 80 feet [24 metres] and were directly beneath the destroyer when all hell broke loose. A series of heavy explosions – the detonation of the Jap's boilers, magazines or both – jolted the *Harder* from one end to the other. Then for the next two hours we sweated out more depth charges and aircraft bombs.'⁵

After this pounding, the commandos felt the need for more medicinal whiskey. Major Chester, still recovering from jungle fever, asked the American sub commander: 'I say, old man, would you mind taking us back to **Borneo**?'⁶

Harder dropped off the Python teams in Darwin in June 1944. Sadly, luck finally ran out for Commander Dealey and *Harder* on 24 August 1944, when it was lost with all hands in a depth-charge attack.

The official record concluded Python 1 and 2 'exceeded all expectations'. It said 500 enemy troops and twenty motor launches were tied up for months searching for the commandos. It also reported movements of eighty-eight enemy ships and established an intelligence network on the northern coast of **Borneo**.

The report was probably written to justify the decision by HQ to send the teams to **Borneo**. Three young commandos were captured and executed. The teams were sick most of the time, and had constant trouble establishing radio contact. The Japanese conducted brutal reprisals against the tribesmen. By any stretch it wasn't a great success.

In 1945, as the Allies steadily beat back the Japanese, Britain was keen to regain a strong presence in **Borneo**. Before the war the island was divided into British and Dutch **Borneo**. The British and the Sultan of Brunei had north-west Brunei and its valuable coastal oil fields. The Dutch had the much larger south and east section of the island. Both Britain and the Netherlands planned to get their colonial territory back once Japan was defeated.

Commandos: Heroic and Deadly ANZAC Raids in World War II



Frank Walker

Historians Australia, 1972, 304 p. - Hardcover - Good paper

11 Reviews

Amazing revelations and extraordinary exploits of Australia's elite secret warriors.

There was something unique about Australians and New Zealanders in war that prompted World War II Allied commandos to turn to ANZAC soldiers' skills and armor to carry out the most dangerous and virtually impossible missions behind enemy lines.

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Now securely established, Chester's Mission was reinforced on 20 January 1944 by PYTHON 2, an all AIF team of six under command of Major W.T.L. Jenkins. Their task was to organise guerrilla warfare in the area, but no sooner had they landed by submarine when one of their

party, Sergeant Brandis, got lost in the jungle and was never found. It soon became clear that the Japanese were onto them and they moved camp to the Tenagian Kechil River further north. After a series of aborted pick-ups, three of PYTHON'S officers were taken off by a US submarine but Lieutenant Rudwick and Sergeant McKenzie were both captured and subsequently executed by the Japanese as spies. Between 30 March and 6 June, four attempts were made to bring off the remaining members of PYTHON, the submarine USS *Harder* finally succeeding, in the process sinking four Japanese destroyers.

PYTHON had been behind enemy lines for 243 days. Despite being continually harassed by the Japanese for the last three months of their stay, the Mission had succeeded in setting up a comprehensive intelligence organisation with the capability of signalling urgent operational matters direct to Darwin. Over eighty-eight enemy shipping movements were notified during this period. The survivors, who had evaded crocodiles and water buffaloes as well as the enemy, were exhausted, Chester himself wracked with regular and violent attacks of malaria. After a period to recover, Chester went to London in October 1944 where he briefed the Far East desk on some of the command and administrative shortcomings he had experienced on PYTHON. Apart from one instance when he had been sent 7,000 lbs instead of 5,000 lbs of stores and the resultant headache of caching unwanted materials, his main bugbear was how he had been ordered to go to an RV which he knew to be dangerous and when he had signalled his reservations, he had been told 'to get on with it' or be relieved.

Tigers Burning Bright: SOE Heroes in the Far East



Alan Cooper
Doubtful Future Publishing, Oct. 1, 2015, 360 pages
ISBN 9781909450000

5 Reviews

The story of the remarkable efforts of British Special Air Service (SAS) in the Far East after 1941 has been largely forgotten. This book tells the story of the SAS in the Far East, their operations (both against the Japanese and the Japanese allies), and how they were able to achieve significant results in strategic and tactical intelligence as well as carrying out numerous dangerous missions behind enemy lines. Some of these missions were based on the enemy's belief that the SAS were the most dangerous and capable of all units in the world. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of the SAS.

During the Pacific war a unique connection developed between prisoners and the submarine force—a dichotomous relationship with the submariners either acting as killers or saviors. Submarines had been used for special missions since early in the war; they acted as lifeguards for aircraft carrier operations, laid mines, sent weather reports, evacuated civilians, did photoreconnaissance, supplied guerrillas, bombarded islands, landed special agents and coast watchers, and rescued prisoners. There were forty-three special missions in 1942, ninety-five in 1943, and ninety-nine in 1944.¹⁹

Submarines were intimately involved with the POW situation in **Borneo**. The Australian group that escaped from Sandakan in June 1943 went to Tawi Tawi and Mindanao. They connected with the guerrillas and passed on information about the prisoners at Sandakan. The result was Operation **Python I**. A party of six Australians with five thousand pounds of supplies and equipment were taken from Fremantle to **Borneo** on the *Kingfish*, and, on 6 October 1943, under Capt. F. G. Chester, they landed at Labian **Point**, about one hundred miles southeast of Sandakan, to establish observation posts along the coast from Sandakan to Tarakan. They were to coordinate efforts with Captain Hamner on Tawi Tawi and report Japanese activities, especially ship movements through the Sulu Archipelago. It was Hamner's group that was first reached by the escapees from Sandakan. These covert operations helped target Japanese tankers running through the area, but they were no help to the POWs at Sandakan. In fact, they were seen as a threat—one that finally resulted in a tragic denouement.

Chester's party successfully operated alone until January 1944, when **Python II** entered the picture. Agents under Maj. William Jenkins, who had escaped from

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Ambon in 1942, were dropped off at Labian **Point** by **Tinosa**. From the start, everything began to go wrong. Sgt. W. Brandis got lost in the jungle and the natives reported him to the Japanese. He was captured and handed over to the Kempeitai. Under torture, Brandis revealed much about the **Python** operations. Soon after, Japanese patrols were hot on the trail of the agents, who were harassed constantly and kept moving between jungle hideouts. Sgt. Donald G. McKenzie and Lt. Alfred J. Rudwick were caught, and it was decided that the remaining men should be evacuated. In March, the survivors reached Tawi Tawi, where they met *Narwhal*, which had just been to Mindanao gathering up Sandakan escapees Major Steele, Walter Wallace, and Jim Kennedy. At Tawi Tawi, *Narwhal* took aboard the **Python** evacuees with Major Jenkins and Captain Hamner and headed for Australia. They painted a grim picture of Australian suffering in Japanese prisons on **Borneo**, much as had the escapees from Mindanao told of the conditions of American prisoners in the Philippines.²⁰

The increased submarine activity, clandestine operations along Borneo's shores, the 10 October uprising, and the killing of Japanese seamen by escaped prisoners caused the Japanese to resort to even harsher treatment. An extra battalion of soldiers was brought in from Manchuria to guard the Sandakan airfield. More machine-gun emplacements were set up. The remaining prisoners were put on starvation rations—about seven ounces of rice a day. The captured **Python** operatives were hanged as spies at Jesselton in December 1944. Late in February 1944, those arrested in the Matthews purge the previous summer were given trials in Kuching. Australian doctor James Taylor and Lt. Rod Wells were given sentences in Outram Road Jail. Eight civilians were shot. Capt. Lionel C. Matthews, having been found guilty, was executed by firing squad on 2 March 1944. As he was driven away he showed that he had lost none of his courage.

Death on the Hellships



Gregory D. Michas

Good Housekeeping Books 300 pp., 2015 | History | 978-0-7327-5800-0

0 Reviews

Through the Japanese treatment of prisoners of war during World War II has been written about before, only with this detailed chronicle will readers come to appreciate the true dimensions of the Allied POW experience at sea. It is a disturbing story, rarely before the Bataan Death March pales by comparison. Summers describe three ordeal in the Japanese hellships as the absolute worst experience of their captivity. Cramped by the thousands into the holds of the ships, moved from island to island and sea to sea, they endured all the horrors of the prison camps magnified tenfold.

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The *Harder*, under Cdr. Samuel D. Dealey, was the next sub to attempt a rescue. When she left Fremantle, she took Major Jenkins, who came along to help effect the rescue of Chester's group. Off Tawi Tawi, *Harder* treated the Aussie to a show when Dealey sank two destroyers on successive nights. On the night of 8 June, *Harder* surfaced offshore and two boats went in, beaching right between two Japanese patrols a mile and a half on either side. Light signals were sent ashore and, finally, a torch flickered in response. Jenkins called out to shadowy figures on the shore.

"Who are you?"

"Gort," came the reply—which was Chester's nickname.

"Is Alex with you?" Jenkins asked.

"Yes," replied the voice of Alexander Chew, another mate of Jenkins.

Confident that they had the right men, the pickup was made, and they hurriedly paddled back to the sub. The last six men of **Python** had been saved. While *Harder* sped for deep water, they spent the night talking nonstop, while trying to wolf down as much good submarine chow as they could eat. The coast watching operation had mixed reviews. They reported eighty-eight Japanese shipping movements through the area, some of which resulted in sinkings. However, they lost some men, and the Japanese tightened the screws on the Sandakan prisoners. Plans were made for their rescue, possibly by 1 Battalion Australian Paratroops, but eventually the idea was scrapped. No advantage was found in taking Sandakan—it had but twenty-three miles of roads, could only be supplied by sea, and had a water-logged airfield. Additionally, extremely poor planning and many foul-ups had delayed action until the window of opportunity had long passed. Politically, had it been taken, it would have put pressure on MacArthur to attempt a rescue of Americans in the Philippines, and, after American POWs were rescued in 1945, it was too late for a similar operation in **Borneo**. In addition, it probably would have caused a spate of massacres throughout the other POW camps in Asia. The Sandakan captives were left to their fate. Prisoners of war, whether on land or at sea, were expendable. In Australia, the story was concealed for years.²¹

The Services Reconnaissance Department had originally planned that Major **Chester** and his men would be reinforced once they were established and in operation. Therefore, on January 10, 1944, the "**Python II**" commandos, along with 5,000 pounds of stores, embarked aboard the USS **Tinosa**. The Z Unit was commanded by Major Bill Jenkins and included Lieutenant Jack Rudwick, Warrant Officer Alec Chew, and Sergeants D. G. McKenzie, Stan Neil, and W. Brandis. Their assignment was to organize guerrilla bands to create havoc among Japanese forces in northeast Borneo.

At dusk, on January 20, the **Tinosa** surfaced off Turtle Beach. Major Chester's detachment jumped into their boats and paddled out to meet the new arrivals. Broadhurst recalled: "We were invited aboard the submarine and, with typical American hospitality, were treated to a banquet of steak and ice cream and loaded down with other luxuries."

After enjoying two hours of comradery—while the sub's crew loaded stores into the rubber boats—both commando parties paddled their heavily laden crafts to shore.

Before the **Tinosa** departed Australia, the "**Python**" supplies had been divided into packs, weighing about twenty pounds each, to facilitate movement through the jungle. However, the number of boat trips necessary to ferry the provisions across three miles of water took much longer than anticipated. Major Chester's campsite at Turtle Beach was 200-yards inland and near the bend of the river which curled back almost parallel to the shore. As daybreak approached, the delay caused a great deal of apprehension among the commandos and the crew of the submarine. Fortunately, all supplies reached the beach before the first light of dawn. The **Tinosa** safely cleared the dangerous waters and continued on its patrol.

The following afternoon, Captain Hamner and Sergeants Neil, McKenzie, and Brandis were checking for enemy activity along the coast when they sighted a sailboat heading into the bay. Hamner remained on watch and sent the others back to report the incident.

About an hour later, Neil and McKenzie staggered into camp. Brandis was not with them. The three men had become disoriented in the thick forest, and after wandering a hundred yards, thought they had lost their way. An argument ensued as to which direction to take. Brandis decided on one path, while Neil and McKenzie elected to follow another trail. The unfriendly jungle quickly swallowed up the commandos.

Sergeant Brandis never arrived back at camp. Search parties were sent out at night and the next day, but no trace of the missing man was discovered. Colonel Courtney remarked: "After the war it was learned that Brandis had found a native hut, where he was given food. He was then betrayed to the Japanese and captured. From his interrogation, the enemy became aware of the existence and location of '**Python**.' Brandis was tried as a spy and beheaded at Jesselton on December 30, 1944."

"Gort" **Chester** correctly assumed that the sergeant had been captured. Native agents also confirmed a rumor that the Japanese had learned that an Australian commando unit was operating along the northeast coast of Borneo.

About the middle of February, enemy troops began landing near Labian Point and fanned out in search of the intruders. One Japanese patrol

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trudged through a jungle area only a few hundred yards from a "**Python**" coast watching station.

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Major **Chester** immediately informed Australian Intelligence of the situation and requested a submarine to pick up Paddy O'Keefe, who was ill with malaria, and Doug Broadhurst who had been assigned to operations planned for Malaya. The USS **Narwhal** was directed to make the pickup on the night of February 17 at Matabuan Island off the coast of Tawi Tawi.

Chester asked Major Jenkins to also return to Australia with the evacuees and arrange a submarine sortie to transfer the commandos to the northwest coast of Borneo. With the enemy now hot on their trail, it would be impossible for the men to travel by land or surface vessel without being seen by the Japanese.

On the evening of the 17th, Jenkins, O'Keefe, Broadhurst, and Captain Hamner paddled a native boat to the rendezvous location. Lieutenant Valera and a Filipino medic, Corporal Likabul, followed in another craft to bring back badly needed supplies for the "**Python**" detachment remaining on Borneo.

Just before dawn on the 18th, Jenkins and his men set up their signal for the submarine—a five-foot circle of white cloth tied between two trees—and waited for the **Narwhal** to make its appearance.

G. B. Courtney stated: "Although Major **Chester** had reported that the evacuation site was unsuitable and insecure, this information was not passed by the SRD to the U.S. Navy. Even worse, the **Narwhal** arrived off Matabuan Island a day early, and not seeing the prearranged signal, continued on its patrol."

The evacuees waited patiently for the submarine until February 27, when enemy activity forced them to leave the area. Jenkins located Colonel Suarez and used his wireless to contact Australia. Another rescue site was agreed upon—this time on the west coast of Tawi Tawi—and scheduled for the first week in March.

On the night of March 5, the **Narwhal** surfaced about 800 yards off the rendezvous point. The sub's crew immediately began hauling the "**Python**" stores topside and stacking the boxes on the deck. A small boat quickly carried the evacuees out to the **Narwhal**. The craft was then hur-

Commando!: The MZ Unit's Secret War Against Japan



A. S. Fenn

Commando!: The MZ Unit's Secret War Against Japan

Book 1

A. S. Fenn

This little-known story of Australia's MZ Unit commandos, and the part they played in the Southwest Pacific during World War II, is a fascinating account of daring, clandestine operations conducted by the Allies deep into enemy-occupied territory. MZ Unit personnel were secretly landed to set up coastwatching posts and radio stations to report on Japanese shipping movements and bombing flights heading to raid Allied positions. Members of the Z Unit carried out assigned raids into enemy-controlled areas, and also attacked targets of opportunity. Many commandos were delivered on their missions by U.S. Navy submarines that sneaked into dangerously shallow

Book 1

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Bill Jenkins's insistence on the need for an evacuation plan for **Python** proved prophetic, for it wasn't long before the group's future looked exceedingly grim. Having inserted the **Python** party, the real problem proved getting them back out once the team came under increasing pressure from the Japanese. The Japanese soon learned that the **Python** men were in the vicinity of Sandakan, and the secret military police, *Kempei Tai*, began pursuing them.

Sgt. William Brandis disappeared in the jungle on 21 January 1944 not long after the landing of **Python II**. Some of the locals handed Brandis over to the *Kempei Tai*, who in turn extracted information about Python's activities. The Japanese next captured Lt. Alfred John Rudwick and Sgt. Donald George McKenzie in an ambush the following month. All three of the commandos were taken to Sandakan prison and tortured. They would eventually be sentenced to death and beheaded at the end of 1944.¹

The remaining men under Chester continued to be harried by the Japanese. From the middle of February, the *Kempei Tai* carried out a concerted effort to find the remaining commandos. Some five hundred Japanese troops and twenty launches were deployed in an intensive search for the operatives. Japanese patrol parties discovered some of their food and store dumps. Posters offered huge rewards for Chester dead or alive. By 29 March, **Python** reported that their food situation was very serious, and Gort Chester radioed for an immediate evacuation date.²

Sam Dealey, like many other **submarine** commanders, did not like special missions. They usually meant going into dangerously shallow waters and near enemy positions. It meant extra men and equipment on board. It meant upsetting routine. It also meant a distraction from going after enemy shipping, the main criterion for a submarine's success. Most **submarine** commanders, regardless of nationality, were more interested in "straight" naval operations and firing torpedoes into enemy ships than providing a taxi service for clandestine agents.³ Whether Sam Dealey was convinced to undertake a special mission to evacuate intelligence personnel from North Borneo or was simply ordered to do so is debatable. But Dealey was only roped into the assignment after a series of other submarines failed.

In the early months of the Pacific war, special missions were the bread and butter of some submarines. They mainly involved supplying and evacuating troops in the Philippines. Later, a handful of Dutch submarines carried out many of the special operations. The Dutch submarines were smaller and better suited to shallow waters. They were also less fit for long distance patrols than the American Fleet boats. Even so, special missions remained common fare. During 1944 alone at least a dozen different U.S. submarines based at Fremantle were involved in landing and evacuating men behind enemy lines.⁴

From the end of March until May 1944, three unsuccessful attempts were made by U.S. submarines to extract the **Python** party. First, the **submarine** USS *Guitarro*, returning to Fremantle from patrol, was diverted for the pick-up. The **submarine** surveyed the coast through its periscope on 30 March 1944. They saw no one, and no one responded to their signal. Only later did they discover that they were given the wrong contact time. In a costly error, headquarters had miscalculated the conversion to local times.

The USS *Haddo*, under Cdr. Chester Nimitz Jr., next tried to pick up the party. When the **Python** party arrived at the designated rendezvous on the morning of 10 April, they fell into a Japanese ambush. They managed to escape but were unable to display the signals for the **submarine** rendezvous. Seeing flashing lights, apparently a normal practice by Japanese in rear areas, the **submarine** suspected a trap. Six days later the *Haddo* did exchange signals with shore. When none of the **Python** men paddled out to the **submarine**, however, Nimitz again suspected a Japanese trap. What he didn't know was that the **Python** men had no boats. The fabric of their canoes had literally rotted, and the men were not about to swim through the crocodile- and shark-infested waters to the **submarine**. Even with a boat, a crocodile had attacked at least one Z unit team when it attempted to land in Borneo, and two other missing commandos were suspected of being taken by crocodiles. The night of the rendezvous several twenty-foot sharks were spotted off shore.

The USS *Redfin*, under Cy Austin, attempted the next rendezvous. This time Austin knew the **Python** party had no boats. They exchanged signals with shore and then sent in a landing party. A volunteer party from the **submarine** paddled a small inflatable boat, towing a larger boat behind them. The current and wind pushed them 4 miles north of the rendezvous, so that unknown to them, they ended up adjacent to a Japanese camp at Dent Haven Bay. The Japanese responded to their signals, drawing them in. Once the party landed, the Japanese opened fire. Ens. E. R. Belz, the party's leader, who was armed with an automatic rifle, managed to hit a number of the attackers. Still shooting, the men paddled back toward their **submarine** as fast as they could. Austin boldly dashed the *Redfin* into the bay to pick up his men and then headed out to sea.⁵

Following the missed rendezvous with the *Redfin*, the **Python** party had to retreat inland. With little food and suffering a variety of tropical diseases, including malaria and blackwater fever, they tried to hang on. Gort Chester signaled on 21 May that if the next pickup failed, their chances of survival were slender. For Chester, who did not suffer fools gladly, the failed evacuation attempts only confirmed his dim view of "HQ bunglers."⁶

With the operation turning into a fiasco, Maj. Bill **Jenkins** was asked to investigate the reasons that the efforts of three submarines to **rescue Python** were unsuccessful. **Jenkins** had already established himself as a stickler for security. In a confidential report on his evacuation in March, **Jenkins** noted some problems with the accommodation on board the *Narwhal*. It seemed the **submarine** was also carrying some civilian evacuees and repatriated service men. **Jenkins** and the **Python** men had to share quarters with these people in the forward and aft torpedo rooms. Given the secret nature of their work, **Jenkins** believed this made conversations difficult. Indeed, he reported that two operatives, the American Cpt. John Hamner and Lieutenant Cain, did far too much talking in this company. Hamner had been charged with setting up three radio stations in the Sulu Archipelago to report on Japanese shipping through the Sibutu Channel. Hamner and Cain later took refuge with the **Python** party in Borneo. In a damning indictment, **Jenkins** noted that Hamner and Cain were "inclined to talk about the task they have done to any person caring to listen."⁷

According to **Jenkins**, the string of failures in trying to extract the remaining **Python** men basically boiled down to a lack of local knowledge, training, and equipment. Furthermore, he recommended that he himself be sent with any future extraction effort. In a report dated 20 May 1944, **Jenkins** gave a two-page synopsis of the failure of previous

missions to extract **Python**. The report was presented to Admiral Christie in Perth on Monday, 22 May. At the same time, **Jenkins** presented plans to evacuate the six remaining **Python** men from the northeast coast of Borneo. Christie approved the plan the same day.⁸

How did Sam Dealey and the *Harder* end up with the mission to get **Python**? There are a couple of conflicting explanations. One involves Murray Tichenor, the chief of operations at Fremantle. Tichenor was keen to do a **submarine** war patrol and finally convinced Admiral Christie to let him go out with the *Harder*. According to one version, Tichenor decided that the *Harder* should do the Borneo special mission and got Christie's approval. By another account, however, Bill **Jenkins** selected Dealey as the right man for the job.

Some evidence suggests that a personal rapport between Sam Dealey and Bill **Jenkins** largely overcame Dealey's reluctance to undertake the mission. Christie first introduced Dealey to **Jenkins** at a party in his "Bend of the Road" home. **Jenkins** and Dealey, of similar stature, apparently hit it off from the beginning. This initial introduction and subsequent meetings apparently won Dealey over.⁹

Death at a Distance: The Loss of the Legendary USS *Harder*



Michael Bunn

New edition (1998-01-01) History 282 pages

0 Reviews

Only seven U.S. submarines earned the Medal of Honor in World War II. Sam Dealey, the USS *Harder*'s commander, was one of them. His Honor was awarded posthumously after his entire crew was lost off Bataan during a death charge attack in August 1943 by a Japanese convoy. The *Harder*'s fighting spirit is legendary, and its record of sinking a total of eighteen enemy ships (with a tonnage in excess of 50,000) made Dealey one of the top five submarine skippers in the war. During a single patrol his crew sank five enemy destroyers in five short-range torpedo attacks, an unprecedented feat. In addition, the *Harder* played important roles in

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