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## HERITAGE SERVICES INFORMATION SHEET NUMBER 14

### THE *KRAIT* AND “Z” SPECIAL UNIT FORCE



Australian War Memorial Negative Number PO1806.008. Photograph showing members of “Z” Force training in canoes on the Hawkesbury River.

Did you know that as a dress rehearsal for the *Krait’s* first attack on Singapore harbour during World War II, the Scorpion party raided shipping anchored in Townsville harbour? Commandos from “Z” Special Force Unit, attached mock up limpet mines to ships in the Cleveland Bay and the harbour and demonstrated the city’s lack of maritime security during wartime.

#### ***The Scorpion Raid***

At 11 pm on 19 June 1943 the train from Cairns stopped just before the Black River bridge. 10 soldiers laden with gear jumped from the last carriage of the train. Their mission was to launch a mock raid on ships in Townsville harbour to test their ability to undertake a similar mission aimed at Japanese shipping. Naval authorities in Townsville were unaware that the raid would take place as the group needed to obtain a true indicator of their preparedness.

Sam Carey was given information that the Black River was tidal and that his party would have no difficulty paddling down it to the sea. He was shocked when he discovered that the river was a series of waterholes separated by stretches of sand. This meant the men had to carry and drag the boats between the waterholes. It was not until late on the 20 June that they reached the mouth of the Black River and the shores of Halifax Bay. The men were tired and exhausted by this time.





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Early on the 21 June they paddled across to Magnetic Island and landed at Picnic Bay. Here they dismantled their canoes and established a camp in the isolated area around Nobby Head. After plotting the location of more than ten ships in the harbour, Carey decided that four canoes should make for the harbour while the fifth canoe would attack the ships in the channel.

At 11 pm on the night of June 22 1943 the commandoes proceeded to the Harbour and shipping channel to attach dummy limpet mines to ships. The party then moved into Ross Creek and came ashore

near the Victoria Bridge at about 7 am. They had not been discovered. The exercise was a complete success and convinced the senior officers that a similar raid on Japanese shipping was possible.

In September 1943 the unit sailed for the South China Sea off Singapore on the Krait. Three two-man teams then paddled into the harbour and successfully destroyed Japanese shipping. The men then paddled fifty miles back to the Krait and returned to Australia without a life lost.

### Acknowledgements:

- Ronald McKie, *The Heroes*, Angus and Robertson, London, 1960.