For several months Z Special Unit (Z Special) laboured in preparation for a mission that they were yet to learn the nature of. Their mission would strike deep within Japanese dominated territory atoning for the allied defeat, just nine months prior, when the fortress of Singapore fell. The mission was Operation Jaywick and it would see a small Japanese sampan, the MV Krait, travel to Singapore where canoe teams would sink enemy shipping in the harbour. Little did they know that Operation Jaywick would become one of the most audacious and celebrated allied raids of WW2.

Late in 1942 the ‘Ann’, a work boat requisitioned by the Service Reconnaissance Department (SRD), made its way down the deep Coal and Candle Creek. Ann’s final destination was a highly secret Z Special training camp known as Camp X. The camp was perched high on cliffs overlooking Refuge Bay just 30 km North of Sydney. At the camp, Z Special readied for the arrival of Ann’s long awaited cargo.

On board the boat was a bespoke order of knives from Melbourne, these knives would form an important part of an ever growing arsenal of deadly weaponry needed for the operation.

Amidst the relentless and gruelling training Lieutenant Donald ‘Davo’ Davidson the mission’s second in command recorded the knives arrival in the Jaywick mission log.

1700h.

“ANN returned from Coal & Candle bringing the long awaited knives from Gregory Steel Products Ltd, Melbourne. They have done an excellent job/work. Four kinds of knives; all with sheaths:- parang; knuckle duster commando knife; wooden handled stiletto – a lovely little job - ;and wooden handled sheath knife for ordinary purposes as well as for stabbing, having for the latter purpose the end 1/3 rd of the blade sharpened on the top edge.”

Jaywick Log entry

SRD notes dated 3rd January 1943 go on to elaborate;

“Four types of knives are used; the stiletto, the knuckle-duster knife and the ‘parang’ or jungle knife. The fourth is a sheath-knife” for normal seamanship purposes but it has half the upper edge sharpened for offensive use if needed.”

This document then describes the knives in some detail.

Service Reconnaissance Department

SRD were authorised ‘Carte Blanche’ by the Master General Ordinance to draw upon stores from across the three services equipment tables. SRD also had access to items not available for wider use within Australia. SRD’s technical directorate was responsible for the testing, improvement and design of mission specific equipment for SRD’s use. Much of SRD’s special equipment was at the cutting edge of technology for the era.

SRD had funding available for the development and purchase of items through the provision of a special account. The organisation used its unique circumstance to procure blade ware to meet the operational needs of missions. SRD files state “special equipment which was not obtainable as normal service issue, is obtained through local purchase or by direct purchase out of ISD funds from the manufacture”. In addition SRD Technical Directorate documents state that “Jungle Knives: Detailed investigations were made as to the performance of jungle knives available and special knives were produced to specifications of party leaders.”

Based upon all available evidence the Jaywick knives were provisioned specifically for the raid from Gregory Steel to meet the parties’ needs for the operation. Mostyn ‘Moss’ Berryman, the sole surviving member of Jaywick, has kindly identified the four Gregory Steel knives provided for the raid.

Below is a collection of recollections about the Jaywick knives from the men who were there.

Knives delivery to Camp X

Moss Berryman who was trained as a paddler and was taken on the raid as a reserve canoeist had the following recollections of the knives;

“The knives were stored in Davidson’s tent.”

“We had no instructors to show us how to use the knife variants properly.”

Jack Mackay, who was removed from the raid just before its departure from Camp X due to injury recalled;

“We had the knives, the stiletto and the knuckleduster, and the working knife.”

(Continued next page)
Z Special training camp – Camp X

Knife fighting training at Camp X

SRD notes observe;

“Knife Combat. Unfortunately there has been no instructor in knife combat available for training at “X” Camp in this type of warfare, so common sense and a knowledge of anatomy has supplied the want. The heart has been the point of aim of all premeditated blows, for sudden and silent dispatch. Other vulnerable parts such as the head, the neck and main arteries have also received attention.”

Arthur ‘Joe’ Jones who was a member of canoe team three also described how training with these knives was conducted in camp;

“So you got to use hand guns and even knives. We would have bags done up to resemble a sentry or something like that and you’d be taught where to come in and how to use a knife on them.”

“Lieutenant Davidson was pretty well versed in that (knife fighting) and he would go through the motions.”

Moss Berryman stated;

“Attacking the sand bags with Knuckle Duster knives we soon became aware of sore fingers.”

Knife fighting training at Camp X

The Parang

Parang is a collective term for swords, big knives and machetes originating from all over the Malay Archipelago.

SRD notes confirm;

“The ‘parang’ is of hardened steel taking a fine edge. Its use is mainly domestic as a jungle knife but as an offensive or defensive weapon it can be very formidable. A hit or slash with the ‘parang’ would dismember a hand or arm, or cleaver right through the skull, whilst a hit on the side or the back of the neck would kill instantly.”

Gregory Steel Parang

The Parang issued to Jaywick members for the raid (sheath design remains unspecified at this time).

The Knuckle Duster Commando Knife

SRD notes specify;

“The knuckle-duster knife is of hardened steel and takes a very fine edge slightly hollow ground. The upper edge is sharpened to half the way. The handle is of heavy alloy. The weapon would break a jaw in the punch, would crunch the skull with its butt, whilst the damage inherent in the blade needs no elaboration.”

Jack Mackay recalled;

“And the knuckleduster, that’s a working knife that fits on your hand, and you could cut his throat and use this thing at the same time. Heavy knife but it is a very versatile knife.”

Ron ‘Taffy’ Morris the medic for the operation said;

“In addition to firearms we used quite a variety of other potentially lethal weapons such as a knuckle duster with short, extremely sharp pointed blade facing inwards for a follow up thrust into the abdomen after a downward facial blow with the knuckle duster section – a formidable weapon but fortunately not used in reality.”

Gregory Steel Knuckle Duster Commando Knife

Knuckled Duster Commando Knife and sheath issued to Jaywick members for the raid.

The Wooden Handled Stiletto

SRD notes account;

“The stiletto has an elongated diamond cross-section and tapers gradually in plane and elevation. Its two fine edges are sharpened to a cutting edge. The steel is specially toughened.”

Jack Mackay described;

“The stiletto was the long one. That’s got the long shank. That fitted down here into the bloke’s heart. You’d get him from behind or down there. The blade would penetrate and just go right through his heart. That’s the idea. There’s a V in your neck there, you’d get the blade in there and go straight through. He’s no longer with you.”
Gregory Steel Wooden Handled Stiletto

Wooden Handled Stiletto and sheath issued to Jaywick members for the raid.

Sheath Knife

SOA notes describe;
“The sheath-knife is for normal seamanship purposes but it has half the upper edge sharpened for offensive use if needed.”

Joe Jones went on to say;
“I carried an ordinary sheath knife but we had knuckle-duster knives and we had stilettos as well as our equipment but I didn’t take mine, I didn’t want to get that close to anyone. No, I thought they were a bit useless and a sheath knife was all you wanted.”

Taffy Morris detailed;
“We had the other working knife just on your belt and my number was seven, so I always wore this thing on my belt.”

Gregory Steel Sheath Knife

Sheath Knife and sheath issued to Jaywick members for the raid.

The Jaywick Knives on operations

On route to Singapore

Moss Berryman confirmed that on board the KRAIT;
“The Knives were stored on deck in a small locker behind the wheel house.”

Taffy Morris stipulate;
“On the actual trip most of these weapons were available and although not actually carried on deck they were always available immediately.”

Horace ‘Horrie’ Young (Leading Telegraphist) recounted how Davidson enjoyed ambushing others in using his ‘favourite trick’ during a stopover, on route to Singapore, at Z Experimental Station in Cairns;

“He (Davidson) would straddle himself across a bough going across the path and drop down on top of some unsuspecting people passing down the trail, put a head lock on them with his knife.”

Ronald McKie’s book The Heroes, discusses the same episode and goes on further to say “He (Davidson) snatched a knife from the sheath he was wearing and the next second it was twanging in a tree-trunk. The double movement, draw and throw, was so quick that Carse (the Krait’s Captain) was amazed.”

Horace went on to say;
“They were playing with arms and slashing at each other with these great stillets and parangs. They weren’t mucking around either. You had to be quick to get out of the way. Davidson was always the showman, a wonderful fellow. Always liked to play to the gallery a bit. I was very impressed with them.”

Moss Berryman recalled;
“The sheath knife would be used now and again, three or four of us would jump overboard and scrape off the fouling growing on the hull.” Paddy (Leading Stocker, James McDowell) was sure we gained an extra knot after it was removed.”

During the raid

SOA notes reveal that for the raid each man as a member of the canoe teams carried a ‘.38 Revolver’ and a ‘knife’ for self-defence on the man as part of a standard load list.

Joe’ Jones observed;
“Each one had a knife, they could choose whatever they wanted, they’d carry a sheath knife.”

“We didn’t carry any implements (knives, forks and spoons) we just had a sheath knife to do anything like that (eat) with.”

Ronald McKie outlined in ‘The Heroes’, on the 20th September 1943, at Pandjang Island, as the craft (canoes) were being set up for transit to Singapore Harbour. “each craft carried two parangs” and “each man carried a sheath knife, Davidson also wore a throwing Stiletto.”

Conclusion

Drawing upon the operational needs of mission Gregory Steel provided an important addition to the Jaywick arsenal of weapons. The number of knives issued for the raid are unknown but by January 1943 there were 20 members in the Jaywick raiding party with the final number of participants being drawn down to a total of 14 by September due to changes in the mission. This collection of knives clearly had an important impact on the psyche of the men of Jaywick as they prepared and conducted one of the most daring raids in modern history. This bespoke delivery of knives to Z Special is one of the least known and most significant events of its type for Australian blade makers during WW2.

Compiled by;
Michael Lobb, 2015.

Acknowledgments
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